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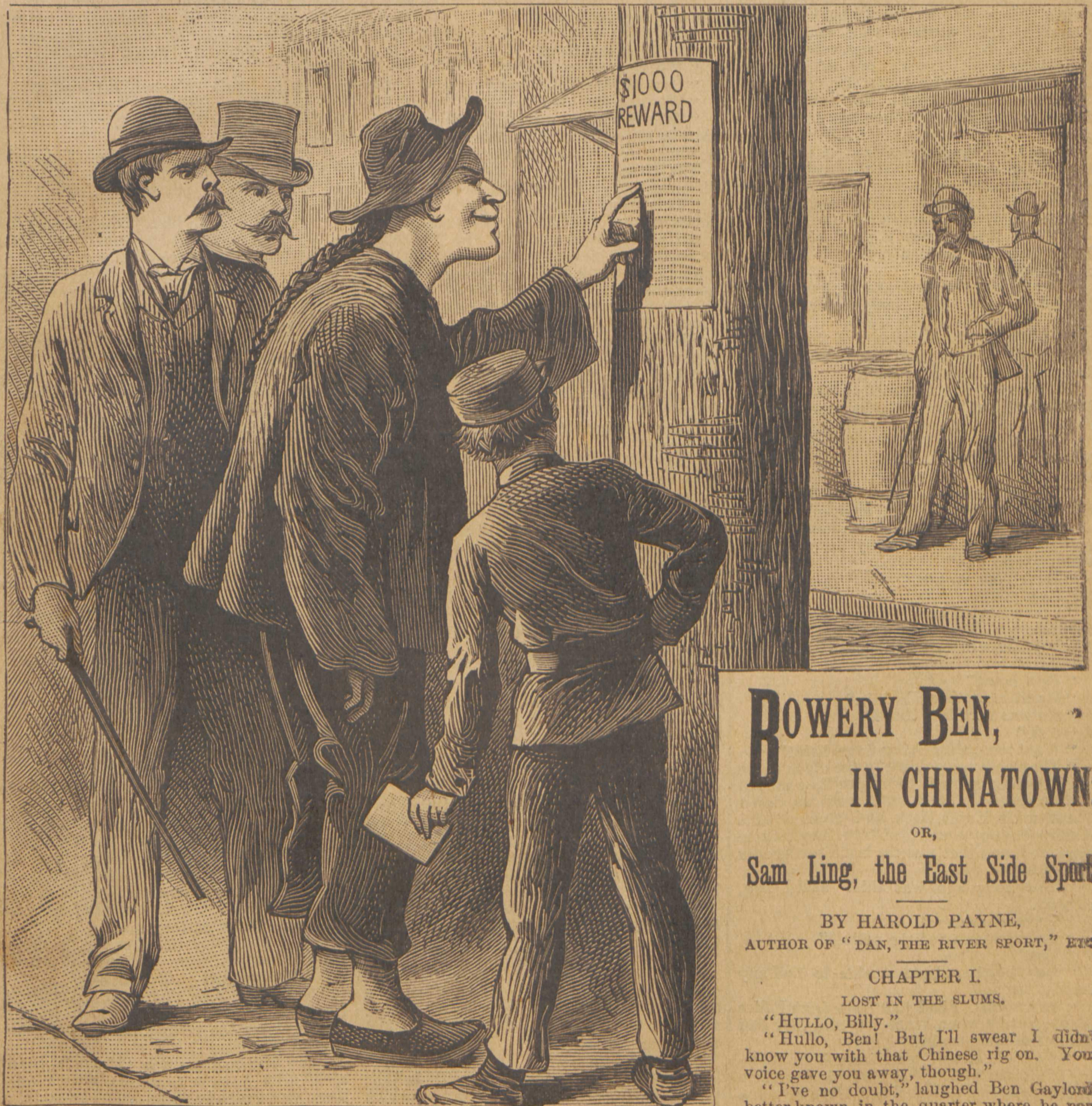
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BOWERY BEN, IN CHINATOWN;

OR,
Sam Ling, the East Side Sport.

BY HAROLD PAYNE,
AUTHOR OF "DAN, THE RIVER SPORT," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

LOST IN THE SLUMS.

"HULLO, Billy."

"Hullo, Ben! But I'll swear I didn't know you with that Chinese rig on. Your voice gave you away, though."

"I've no doubt," laughed Ben Gaylord, better known in the quarter where he now was as Lung Foo. "But I don't generally

"RUN AHEAD, BILLY, AND FIND OUT WHAT THE NATURE OF THE POSTER IS."

Bowery Ben in Chinatown.

use the voice and the make-up together. It was because I knew that you wouldn't recognize me in my Chinese lingo, that I used my natural voice."

"How do you come to be made up like that, Ben?"

"Why, you see, a good part of my work is among the Chinese and by making up like this I am able to go among them without their suspecting that I am not one of them-selves."

"Then you must be pretty well acquainted in this part of the town, I should think?"

"Well, if I ain't, I'd like you to find me somebody that is."

"I'm glad of that," replied Billy.

"How's that?"

"Maybe you can help me out."

"With pleasure, if I can. But what's the trouble, Billy?"

"My sister is lost down in here somewhere."

Ben Gaylord, variously known as Lung Foo, the Chinese Detective, the boy detective, and sometimes Bowery Ben, although only eighteen and extremely boyish in appearance, had already won considerable fame as a detective, and was esteemed by Superintendent Byrnes as one of his ablest and most trustworthy assistants.

Gaylord was a bright, handsome young fellow, with a muscle of iron and as brave as a lion.

He had a large, expressive and extremely tender blue eye, and a face as smooth as that of a girl, which served him a good purpose sometimes, when he wished to impersonate a female, or even a Chinaman.

William Brooks was a year his junior, being but seventeen, and the two had been schoolmates.

Billy was also athletic, strong and brave, but his course of life had been somewhat different from that of his friend.

He had entered the service of the District Telegraph Company on leaving school, and had continued in it ever since.

The two friends had met at the bend of Mott street just where Doyers street runs into it.

"You don't mean to say that your sister is lost in this dreadful neighborhood?" said Ben.

"I don't know that positively," rejoined his friend, "but the last seen of her was down this way, and I have an idea that she got lost and was taken in by some of these villainous people."

"Which one was it?"

"Fanny."

"I remember Fanny very well, and I am very sorry to hear that she is in trouble. You say she was last seen down this way?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"My little brother, Freddie."

"He was with her, then?"

"Yes."

"What were they doing down here?"

"They had come down to the office to see me. As they started to return they missed their way, so Freddie says, and wandered about until it was dark, and then all of a sudden, the boy cannot tell how, they became separated, and that was the last Freddie ever saw of her."

"How long ago was this?" asked Ben, eagerly.

"Three days ago."

"Have you notified the police?"

"Yes."

"And they have been unable to find any trace of her?"

"So it seems. I had just come from Police Headquarters when I met you, and they had learned nothing so far."

"Well, old chum!" exclaimed Bob, grasping his friend's hand, "if Fanny is anywhere in these diggings I'll find her, depend upon it. As I said awhile ago, I know every crook and turn of this locality, and she can-

not escape me. You do not think she would have gone off of her own accord, do you?"

"I know she would not."

"Very well. I do not believe it either, and that will be to our advantage."

"Will you try to find her, Ben?" asked his friend eagerly.

"Why ask such a question as that, Billy?" inquired Ben reproachfully. "You know I will."

"Of course I know you will—that is, if you have time. But I didn't know whether you'd have time or not. I didn't know but you might be engaged upon some other case."

"So I am," responded Ben, "but that won't hinder me from attending to this one also, especially as the one I am on is located in this neighborhood."

"I'm delighted to hear it, Ben," cried Brooks enthusiastically, "for I know of no one to whom I can intrust the fate of my sister as to yourself."

"Thanks. Well, come on," said Ben. "You haven't anything to do for the rest of the evening, have you?"

"No."

"Well, come along."

"Where are you going?"

"Over here in Pell street."

"What's over there?"

"There's an opium-joint run by a Chinaman by the name of Hung Lee, and we may be able to find out something there."

The friends walked on together for some distance, and as they walked Ben resumed:

"This Hung Lee is one of the worst characters among the Chinese residents of this quarter. He was run out of San Francisco on account of his connection with the High-bindlers out there, and he has had a good many collisions with the police of this city on account of running a fan-tan den or opium dive. They no sooner have him closed up in one than he opens in the other business."

"And you think it likely that Fanny may have been enticed into his place?" asked Billy.

"More likely that she has been carried in by force."

"Are they in the habit of doing that sort of thing?"

"Indeed they are. Scarcely a week passes that some young girl is not abducted and carried into these dens, and then sent away to San Francisco to become the wife of some Chinaman."

"The fiends!" muttered Billy. "I hope that hasn't been the fate of poor Fanny!"

"I hope not," returned Ben. "But look! If I am not very much mistaken, that is Hung Lee now."

"Which?"

"The big Chinaman standing there reading the bill. Run ahead, Billy, and find out what the nature of the poster is that he is so much interested in, and I'll wait here. He would recognize me in this rig, and I don't wish him to know that Lung Foo is in the neighborhood."

The messenger boy approached the post where the bill was hung, and found Hung Lee reading the advertisement offering \$1,000 reward for the discovery of Fanny.

"Dey t'ink findee gal, pay thousand dollee!" muttered the Chinaman, with a chuckle.

Hung Lee then moved on, still chuckling to himself, and Billy waited for the detective to come up.

"What is it, Billy?" he asked.

"Why, as you see," said Billy, "it is the advertisement we had printed offering a thousand dollars for the recovery of Fanny, and that Chinaman was reading it and chuckling over it."

"What did he say?"

"He said 'They think they will find the girl by paying a thousand dollars,' by which I infer that he thinks we won't."

"Then there is no doubt that it was Hung

Lee. But I mustn't go on in this rig. They would know me sure."

"What are you going to do?"

"I have a room near here, and I will just run up there and make up as my other character 'Bowery Ben'. They won't suspect anything then. And the next time I make up as a Chinaman I shall go to a laundryman friend of mine and procure a different suit, one they haven't seen."

With that Ben hurried away, and in fifteen minutes returned made up as Bowery Ben.

They walked on some distance, and finally the detective said:

"Here we are. Now mum's the word," and as he spoke turned into a shop with counters on each side and filled with Chinese goods.

Several Chinamen were in the place, chattering away in their own outlandish language, while behind the counter on one side stood a fat, oily-faced Chinaman, better dressed than the rest and wearing the little round cap with a red button on top, signifying that he was a mandarin of high degree.

He appeared to be on intimate terms with Ben, for as soon as he entered the place the Chinamen grinned, bobbed his head, and said:

"Hello, Blen! Wanta hlit the plipe?"

"Dat's right, Hung Lee," replied Ben, imitating the East Side dialect. "I wanter hit it hard, see?"

"All littee," grinned the Chinaman.

"Flend?" he went on, glancing at Billy.

"Yep, dat's er pal o' mine, Hung Lee. He's all right."

"I know him all littee," smirked the heathen. "Everblody all littee you bling. Walek up stlairs. You findee pl-enty plipe."

"Yer bet yer life he's all right, Hung Lee!" grunted Ben as he and his companion pushed past the knot of Celestials into the back room.

They were soon after ascending a narrow, dark and bad-smelling flight of stairs.

At the top was a frail-looking door, around the ill-jointed edges of which oozed the sickish-sweet odor of opium.

Ben was accustomed to this, and did not mind it, but it gave Billy a sense of dizziness and nausea.

Ben gave three distinct raps on the door, and pretty soon a wicket was pushed aside and a Chinaman's face appeared at the opening.

"Who lat?" demanded a voice from within.

But recognizing the detective at that moment, it said:

"Oh, lat Blen! Hlello, Blen! Come in!" And opened the door.

CHAPTER II.

HITTING THE PIPE.

It was a queer sight that met their eyes when the door of the opium joint was opened to the two friends.

That is, it was queer to Billy.

So far as Ben was concerned, he had seen it so often that it was nothing new to him.

An oblong room of perhaps thirty by twenty feet in dimensions, poorly lighted and worse ventilated, the walls grimed with smoke and dirt, and the room itself totally unfurnished except for something like twenty dingy-looking mattresses thrown about on the floor, was what they saw.

Lying about on these bunks, in various stages of stupor, were perhaps a dozen men of various degrees of degradation.

The place was reeking with the sickening fumes of the drowsy drug which hung in clouds about the ceiling almost concealing it from view.

Ben's first business was to glance hastily about with a view to ascertaining whether there was anybody there whom he could recognize.

Having apparently satisfied himself on

that score, he turned to the expectant Chinaman who had admitted him and his friend and said:

"Ain't much of er crowd ter-day, Hop Sing. Wot's der matter wid der joint? Runnin' down?"

"No, he not runee dlow," replied the Chinaman, with a grin. "Heep clome nightee. No clome day tlime. Want hlit plipe, Ben?"

"Yep, we'll hit de pipe, Hop Sing," replied Ben. "Try it, Billy?" he asked, turning to his friend, at the same time winking significantly.

Billy did not relish the idea, but he did not know how to get out of it.

"Yes, I s'pose so," he rejoined.

"You needn't smoke," stepping close to him and whispering. "Make a bluff. That's all you've got to do."

"Yo' flend smlock?" inquired the attendant.

"Yes, he'll hit the pipe, Hop Sing," answered Ben.

"All lитеe. Take blunk," said the Chinaman, pointing to an unoccupied bunk.

Ben and his friend lay down side by side on the mattress and presently the attendant brought a couple of queer-shaped pipes and handed one to each of the boys.

He then took a small lump of opium from a tin box with a couple of bits of wire, which he used like a pair of pincers, or as he would two chop-sticks.

Placing the drug in the bowl of the pipe, he lit a match and held it over the pipe for a moment, at the same time jabbing one of the wires down into the bowl and saying:

"Dlaw, Ben, dlaw!"

"Dat's all right, Hop Sing," rejoined Ben. "I'm drawin' hard 'nuff ter pull er toot."

The Chinaman then went through the same operation with Billy, repeating the injunction:

"Dlaw, mlister, dlaw!"

He then turned his attention to Ben again, who appeared to be a great favorite with the Chinaman.

As he jabbed the wire into the bowl of Ben's pipe, the young detective began in a sly way to question him.

"Yer say youse has lots o' business at night, Hop Sing?" he said in a careless tone.

"Pl-entee," replied the Chinaman. "Hleeps mlen, clome nightee."

"Plenty o' them, eh?"

"Pl-entee."

"Any women, Hop Sing?"

"No. Not have Chinee women."

"Hung Lee has a wife, I s'pose?"

"Yep."

"But she don't come here, eh?"

"No."

Ben thought he had got into the fellow's confidence sufficiently by this time to come out a little bolder.

"Did he steal a white girl two days ago, Hop Sing?" he questioned.

"Tlwo days 'go?" mused the Chinaman.

"Yep, 'bout dat long."

"Las," replied the Chinaman. "Tlwo dlays 'glo."

"Wot was she like?"

"Hleep pleddy," answered the fellow, grinning very much. "Allee slame plicture on tea-chlest."

"Like a girl on a tea-chest, eh?"

"Las."

"She must er been a Chinee, den?"

"Allee slame."

"Wot was she?"

"Allee slame you callee shleeney."

"Oh, she was a sheeney, was she?"

"Las."

"Wal, have yer seen anyt'ing of er gurl wid light hair an' blue eyes?"

"Led hlair?"

"Yep, sorter dat way," returned Ben. "Sorter wot we call er blonde, wid hair de color o' taffy."

"No, me no slee," answered the Celestial. "Shure?"

"No, me no slee," replied the attendant, positively.

"I believe ye'r lyin' ter me," growled Ben, "but I s'pose I'll have ter take yer word fer it."

"No, me no lie," protested Hop Sing.

The young detective lapsed into silence, and the Chinaman likewise remained silent for some time, but finally ventured:

"Whalet flor yo' ask 'blout glul, Blen?"

"Oh, nothin'," rejoined the detective, indifferently. "I didn't know but Hung Lee might be a goin' in fer blondes, for wives for his friends. See?"

"Yo' hear slomebbody slay pleddy glul lost, Blen?" persisted the Chinaman, whose suspicions or curiosity, one or the other, had been aroused.

"Nope," drawled Ben.

"No leed in plaper?"

"Nope."

"No hear ploleece talkee?"

"Not er whisper, Hop Sing."

The fellow was silent a few moments, meanwhile eying the detective narrowly.

But he failed to discover any change of countenance in that direction, for Ben's face might have been carved out of stone for all the expression there was in it.

Indeed, it had more the expression of that of a man who was about to drop off to sleep than anything else.

At length the Chinaman arose from his squatting posture, and straightening himself up, said:

"Blen, yo' slay bimebly Hop Sing lie. Now Hop Sing slay yo' lie alle slame hleep 'Melican man!"

In an instant Ben was upon his feet and had the Chinaman by the throat.

"Wot's dat yer say, yer yaller-faced rater?" he yelled.

The fellow was too badly frightened to make any response except a sort of gurgle, which the detective could not have imagined could have been heard twenty feet away.

"Call me er liar, yer ginger-faced headen!" pursued the boy, affecting to be terribly angry, although he was not in the least so, "and I'll fix youse up fer a Chinee funer'l, see?"

The Chinaman continued to gurgle inarticulately, and whether it was really heard down-stairs, or it was the voice of Ben himself that alarmed them, he could never tell, but the next instant the door flew open and Hung Lee, followed by a dozen Mongolians, rushed into the room.

As soon as his eyes fell upon the crowd Ben relaxed his grip on Hop Sing's windpipe and turned to face the others.

Hung Lee was white with rage as he glared at the young detective savagely.

"Whalet mlatter?" he growled.

"Dere's nuttin' de matter," replied Ben, "on'y dis yaller-faced headen called me er liar, an' dat don't go down wid yourn trooly, Hung Lee. See?"

"Yo' git out!" yelled Hung Lee. "Yo' wantee flight, ye' flight Hung Lee!"

With that he made at Ben with a club he held in his hand.

He was closely followed in his attack by the other Chinamen, and soon the young detective found his hands full.

Billy, who had regained his feet, took a hand, however, and he was no weakling in a rough-and-tumble.

CHAPTER III.

OLD STUMP, THE BUM.

THOUGH greatly outnumbered, Ben and his friend were equal to the occasion.

It is a well-known fact that Chinamen can not hold their own with Americans.

Ben and Billy both had the advantage of being expert boxers, and, although the Chinese came at them with clubs, they were too much excited to do any execution.

The young men were cool and collected, watched their opportunity, and got in a telling blow at the proper time.

And it never failed to do execution.

Every time Ben's arm shot out a Chinaman went down like a shot stag.

The melee was of short duration, therefore, for by the time that Hung Lee and half a dozen of his pals had been laid out the rest became panic-stricken and took to their heels.

The boys took this opportunity to make their escape from the place.

"Well, that was a lively beginning," observed Ben when they had reached the sidewalk. "I think it was a mistake, though."

"Yes, I do too," rejoined Billy. "And it was a great surprise to me."

"It was no more of a surprise to you than it was to myself," interposed Ben. "When I jumped up my idea was to choke that lemon-colored heathen a little and let it go at that. You have to do that once in a while to let them know their places. I had no idea the saffron-faced hoodlum was squawking loud enough to arouse the others."

"It wasn't his squawking that brought them up, I don't think," ventured Billy.

"What was it, then?"

"It was yourself, I imagine."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes. You see you talked pretty loud."

"Perhaps I did. Well, we didn't learn anything by that deal, after all."

"Where next?" questioned his friend.

"We'll go down here to Wah Hop's, and see what we can learn there."

"Does he keep an opium den?" asked Billy timidly.

"No, he keeps a restaurant, and it is a great hang-out for the worst characters in this section, both Chinamen and white men."

"You think you might learn something there, eh?"

"Almost sure to. Some of these toughs make a living by doing odd jobs for these high-toned mandarins like Hung Lee. Some of them have it in for him, too, and are only too glad to give him away to the police, if there is a shadow of a chance."

Billy walked on in silence.

He was not favorably impressed with the adventure through which he had just passed, and, although he was anxious to rescue his sister, he would have rather that Ben had prosecuted the search alone.

However, he was too brave a lad to falter, and went along meekly, fully expecting that their next adventure would prove quite as fruitless and more disastrous than the last one.

They were not long in reaching the restaurant, which was in Mott street, in a basement.

Ben took the lead and Billy followed rather timidly.

The restaurant was not an inviting place by any means, and its patrons, made up, as the detective had intimated, of the worst characters in that tough neighborhood.

Billy shivered as he glanced about at the wretched and vicious-looking people who sat at the tables or sat dozing in their chairs.

At length he got a chance and whispered to Ben:

"You don't think of eating in this place, do you?"

"Why not?" laughed Ben.

"I'm afraid I can't go the grub," ventured the other.

"Then don't. But there is nothing to hinder you from making a bluff, as you did at the opium smoking."

Billy said no more, and the two boys sat down at a table.

Just then the proprietor caught sight of Ben, and called out:

"Hullo, Blen! Whalet up?"

"Oh, nuttin'," replied the young detective. "Jes' lookin' roun', dat's all. Wot yer got ter eat, Wah Hop?"

Bowery Ben in Chinatown.

"Nicee thling," grinned the Chinaman. "Nicee lice, sloup, chickee, bled, blutter, tea—"

"All right, Wah Hop," interrupted Ben. "Bring me some rice and a cup o' tea."

"No sloup? Nicee sloup."

"No, I don't want no soup," growled Ben. "I'm afeared dere might be rats in it."

"No, no, no!" protested the Chinaman, raising his hands in a deprecating manner. "Me no glot lats. Wah Hop no clock lats."

"Dat's w'ot yer say," muttered Ben. "Anyway, bring on de rice and tea. W'ot's yourn, Billy?" he said, turning to his companion.

"I'll take the same," replied Billy.

"Yo' flend no likee sloup?" questioned the Chinaman.

"No, he don't want none o' yer soup either," replied Bob.

"Him flaid lats too?"

"Yep, he's afraid o' rats too."

"No lats," repeated the Mongolian. "Nicee chlicken sloup."

"All right, feed it ter yer udder customers," muttered Ben. "Yer can't git it inter us wid er squirt-gun. See?"

Wah Hop went away to fetch the rice and tea, and he had no more than disappeared into an inner room, when a tough looking specimen of humanity slouched into the restaurant.

When he reached about the center of the room he stopped and glanced about him.

Presently his eyes fell upon Ben, and he shuffled over to the table where the boys sat and, putting out a dirty hand, cried:

"W'y, hello, Ben! Whur did youse drop frum?"

"Hello, Stump!" exclaimed Ben in return. "Whur did youse come frum?"

"Oh, I jes kinder floated in on de tide," replied the old fellow, who appeared to be a tramp in the last stages of decay. "Gwine ter ax er feller ter eat, Ben?"

"Shure," returned the young detective. "Sot down an' order yer bait."

The old fellow sunk into a chair on the opposite side of the table from the boys and stroked his long, tangled gray beard.

If Billy's appetite was backward before, it was doubly so now, for Old Stump, the Bum, as he was called, was about the least savory old villain that one could wish to meet.

No one knew how old he was, and it would have required an equal stretch of memory to have recollected when he last washed himself.

His clothes were in tatters, his face and hands were begrimed with dirt, and his breath was strongly impregnated with the fumes of bad whisky.

Billy was less surprised that his companion should have known this queer old relic than he was at the fact of his inviting him to sit down to the table with him.

Wah Hop soon returned with the rice and tea and put them on the table, and then Ben asked:

"What air yer a-goin' ter eat, Stump?"

"Ever'ting go?" inquired the old fellow, a little doubtful as to the limit of his privilege.

"Yep," replied Ben. "Order w'ot yer want, Stump. I reckon I kin stan' it."

"Youse mus' er been makin' er raise, I reckon," grinned the old chap.

"Dat's right, Stump."

"Not policy?" ventured the tramp.

"Nope."

"Not fan-tan?"

"Guess again."

The old man scratched his head and meditated.

"Order yer grub, Stump," interposed Ben, "an' we kin talk arterwards."

"Gimme some tripe an'—"

"Sloup?" suggested the Chinaman.

"Yep, he'll swill some o' yer rat soup,

Wah Hop," laughed Ben. "Fetch it along."

As the Oriental once more disappeared Old Stump resumed:

"Now den, w'ot was it youse struck, Ben?"

"Yer can't guess in er week," declared the young detective.

"It wasn't hoss?" ventured the old man.

"Right yer air dis trip, Old Stump!" ejaculated Ben. "Put 'er dere. I struck 'er rich on hoss! Dat's right."

"Dat's good!" cried the tramp. "How much did yer run in fer?"

"Oh, a matter o' fifty plunks."

"Hully chee! Say, youse kin drop er feller er a plunk er two, I reckon?"

"Yep, dat's w'ot," rejoined Ben. "If yer kin gimme er a tip w'ot I'm lookin' fer, Old Stump, youse is good fer a tenner. W'ot d'yer say ter dat?"

"I'm yer huckleberry," declared the tramp. "W'ot's yer lay?"

Ben related briefly the case he was engaged upon, knowing that the old vagrant was often engaged by Hung Lee to do his dirty work, but refrained from mentioning the reward offered for the girl's recovery, as he knew the old fellow would want it all.

CHAPTER IV.

THE COMPACT.

WHEN Old Stump's food was brought he found no time for anything for some time but the discussion of the same.

With his face bent low over his plate and his shaggy beard sweeping through his victuals, he proceeded to devour everything before him with the voraciousness of a cormorant.

This put an end to whatever appetite Billy had mustered, and he could do nothing but sit and stare at the strange spectacle with a sense of the utmost disgust.

Finally, when the last morsel of food had disappeared from the hungry man's plate, he raised his head, wiped his mouth on his coat-sleeve, and said:

"So thar's a gal into it, eh?"

"Yes," replied Ben.

"Who is she? Some high-toned 'un?"

"It makes no difference to you, Old Stump, who she is," retorted Ben, shortly. "All I want of you is to help find her, if you think you can do me any good."

"Yep," mumbled the old man, gazing reflectively into space. "And youse thinks Hung Lee hes her, eh?"

"I don't say that he has her, but it is more than likely that he knows something about her, if she was abducted in this neighborhood."

"Shure," grunted the vagabond.

In his earnestness, the detective had forgotten his dialect, but fortunately the other had not noticed it, and Ben made haste to resume it.

"I know dat youse offen done work fer de Chinee, see? An' youse mus' know sumpin' 'bout w'ot's goin' on round his joint."

Old Stump made no response to this beyond an elevation of his shaggy brows, which seemed to imply that perhaps he did, and perhaps he did not.

"Now, I wanter put it to yer straight, Old Stump," he pursued, waxing confidential, "an' I don't want no flim-flam or skulduggery, an' dere's dust at de bottom of it."

"Wal?" yawned the tramp.

"Have youse saw a gal 'bout de Chinee's joint widin two or t'ree days?"

"W'ot sort of er gal, Ben?" asked the old man.

"Er purty gal, wid blonde hair an' blue eyes."

"Nope."

"Shure?"

"Dead shure, Ben."

"Den youse t'ink he ain't had nuttin' to do wid dis racket, eh?"

"I don't say dat, Ben. I on'y say dat I ain't saw 'er."

"Still, dere's a chance dat he mighta had sumpin' ter do wid carryin' her off?"

"Course."

"Youse knows dat he has done dat way, eh?"

"Shure."

"W'e're does he take dem?"

The old wretch eyed his questioner narrowly for some moments, and then said:

"Dere's plunks in dis, is dey, Ben?"

"Didn't I tell yer der was?" growled Ben impatiently.

"How much?"

"Cordin' ter w'ot yer does. Mebby ten, mebby fifty."

"Hully cheel!" the old man was wide awake now.

"Does dat strike?"

"I reckon."

"An' ye'r' me chip?"

"To de las' ditch."

"Put 'er dere!" cried Ben, extending his hand.

"But say?" muttered Old Stump!

"Wal?"

"Dey ain't no peachin', is dey?"

"Nary a peach."

"'Cause," pursued the old man seriously, "if yer gives me away ter de Chinee, I'm a goner."

"I'll never give yer away. 'Sides, if I git de evidence I hopes to ag'in' dis duck, he won't do no harm to nobody fer long. Now answer me question."

The old man was silent for some moments, and then responded:

"Yer see, de Chinee furnishes white gals fer wives to his fr'en's all over."

"I see."

"He never keeps dem long here fer de rea son dat he's afeared de cops'll git onto him."

"I ketch on."

"Some o' his fr'en's is in Philadelphia, some in St. Lewy an' some in Frisco. De chances is, if de gal youse is lookin' fer is er purty one, he's packed her off ter Frisco."

While this was apparently given as merely the opinion of the old villain, Ben was acute enough to see beneath the surface, as he believed, and to recognize that there was something more than conjecture in it.

He believed that the old man knew that the girl had been spirited away to the Pacific Coast, and was determined to ascertain the truth if there was any possibility of it.

"Yer t'ink, do yer?" he muttered.

"Yep."

"Lookee hiar, Old Stump, doncher know?"

"Nope, not fer shure."

"Doncher not on'y know all 'bout it, but know dat I knows dat yer do—say?"

The old man's beard twitched and his eyes dropped.

"I'm tellin' yer strait, Ben," he muttered. "I on'y t'ink."

"Dat settles it!" cried Ben, with affected indignation. "Any man w'ot won't act square wid me's no good, an' he don't come in fer any o' me plunks, see?"

With that he arose from the table and strode indignantly toward the door.

Billy arose and followed, and they were soon on the sidewalk.

"Another failure," whispered Billy.

"Don't you believe it," returned Ben. "I'm dead on to that old duffer's game. He wants to hold me off as long as possible in hopes of raising me on the price. Mind my words, he'll be after us before we get far. Come on."

The two friends walked on leisurely, conversing in a low tone.

It had grown quite dark by this time, and the wretched lights in this locality only served to make the darkness more apparent.

They had reached the corner of the first street and paused to determine which way to go next, when they heard the shuffling sound of feet approaching from the direction of the restaurant they had just left.

"That is he, or I'll eat my hat!" whispered Ben.

And he was not mistaken.

A moment later the dim light revealed the slouching form of Old Stump shuffling along as rapidly as his age and decrepitude would permit.

Ben turned his back and affected not to see him, and pretty soon the old fellow was upon them.

"Hullo, Ben!" he called in his wheezy voice. "I was afeared I'd lost yer."

The detective turned and looked at him with well-feigned surprise.

"Hullo, Old Stump!" he said! "Is dat youse?"

"Shure."

"Wal, w'ot d'yer want?" growled Ben.

"I wanter talk wid yer," muttered the old man in a confidential tone.

"Talk wid me?"

"Yep."

"W'ot about?"

The old fellow twisted about uneasily, pulled his beard and finally said:

"Youse didn't bleeve me w'en I told yer dat I didn't know 'bout de gal bein' packed off ter Frisco?"

"Course not."

"Don't blame yer."

"Yer knows den?"

"I do."

"An'she's gone?"

"Yep."

"Air yer shure o' dis?"

"Deal shure."

"Did yer see her go?"

"Nope, but I heered all 'bout it."

"Oh, yer did?"

"Dat's right."

The old man was silent a moment, and then resumed:

"Say, Ben?"

"Wal?"

"Do I get any plunks ter-night?"

"If yer kin furnish me de proof o' w'ot yer say yer do."

"Den come on," said the old man, starting off.

CHAPTER V.

THE PLOT REVEALED.

As they were going in the direction of Pell street again, Ben suspected that his guide intended taking him back to Hung Lee's, and he did not care to go there after what had passed on the occasion of the former visit.

"Which way, Old Stump?" he asked before they had proceeded very far.

"Over hiar to er Chinee's," replied the tramp.

"Not Hung Lee's?"

"Nope, to anudder place."

"I'm glad o' dat, fer I didn't wanter go there."

"Den youse ain't on good terms wid 'im?"

"Not much."

"Wal, hiar we air."

And the old fellow turned into a narrow doorway which led into an even smaller and dirtier shop than that of Hung Lee's.

Like the other, though, it was crammed and packed full of goods of some mysterious kind, so that, with the half-dozen Chinamen who stood about, it was next to impossible to crowd in.

Old Stump pushed his way up to the counter, behind which a fat, greasy looking Celestial stood smoking a long pipe, and who appeared to know the tramp, for he came forward with a grin.

The old man said something to the Chinaman in his own language, and the latter

nodded and pointed with his pipe-stem toward the rear of the shop.

Old Stump then backed away from the counter and, beckoning to the boys to follow, proceeded toward the back door.

As they neared the door Billy whispered to Ben and said:

"If this is another opium dive, I don't want to smoke. I can't stand it."

"It isn't an opium dive," returned Ben.

"What is it?"

"A fan-tan game, I guess."

They pushed their way on through and came into a narrow passage not more than three feet wide and so dark that they were compelled to grope their way.

Old Stump appeared to know the way, however, and walked straight ahead for some distance, and the boys at length heard him knock at a door, although it was too dark to witness the action.

Pretty soon thereafter a face appeared at a wicket which had been drawn aside in the door, and a voice asked:

"Who lere?"

"Hi langa wo!" replied the old man.

This appeared to be the open sesame, for the next instant the door was swung open.

It appeared to be necessary for an explanation with regard to the old chap's two companions, for he stopped and held quite a conversation in Chinese, during which the attendant darted frequent and suspicious glances at the boys.

At length he seemed to be satisfied that all was right, for he stepped aside to allow them to pass in.

Our friends found a long room, sparsely furnished and dimly lighted. It was also quite as poorly ventilated as Hung Lee's was, as the twenty or thirty Chinamen who sat cross-legged on mats about the floor were smoking, the atmosphere of the place was almost stifling.

The room was so dimly lighted by the half dozen smoky lamps that the boys were unable at first to make out what the little groups of Chinamen were doing.

But as their eyes became accustomed to the darkness they discovered that these fellows were playing the queer game of fan-tan.

Before they had time to examine into the process very closely, however, Old Stump had drawn them aside and informed them that they were to pass on into the next room.

Even Ben, with all his wariness, was mystified at this, but said nothing and followed his guide.

At the further end of the room another narrow door opened, admitting the trio into still another narrow passage.

Again groping their way along in the darkness they finally came to what the boys supposed was a door, but which proved to be nothing more than a partition at which the passage ended.

The boys were more mystified than ever, but the old man soon put them at their ease by turning and explaining:

"We'd better stop hiar, an' purty soon we'll see an' hear sumpin'."

They remained standing there in the darkness for several minutes, neither of the party deigning to speak.

At length sounds of voices were heard on the opposite side of the partition.

By listening attentively they could discern that the conversation on the other side of the wall was in English and the pigeon English peculiar to the Chinese.

Pretty soon our friends discovered that a light had been struck in the other room, and it streamed through a number of cracks in the wall.

"Now d'en," whispered the old man, "put yer eyes ter de cracks an' yer'll see sumpin'."

The boys followed his advice and found that he had told the truth.

Around a table sat four Chinamen and two white women.

The women were middle aged, their eyes bleared and their faces bloated and discolored from dissipation.

Ben did not notice for some time that one of the Chinamen had a bandage over his eye.

And when he did finally notice the fact he was greatly surprised.

It was Hung Lee.

The bandage was in consequence of the blow Ben had dealt him a few hours previously.

But the young detective soon became absorbed in what they were saying.

One of the women and Hung Lee did about all the talking.

"Yo' wantee too mulech flor glul, P'izen Kate," the Chinaman was protesting. "Me no give. Me glive tlen dolley. Me no glive more."

"Oh, why do you want to be so stingy Hung Lee?" grumbled the woman. "You have plenty of money, and can well afford to give fifteen."

"Me no glive," was the stubborn answer. "Me glive fliftteen for led bled glul last weel-ek, no glive fliftteen lis tlime."

"That was the girl you sent to Frisco, wasn't it?" questioned the woman.

"Las."

"And I didn't make a cent off of her."

"How yo' no mlake slent, P'izen Kate?"

"I had to pay her five, and afterward I had to give a policeman ten, to keep away till you got her out of sight."

"Lat not my blisness," growled the Chinaman. "Me glive fliftteen dolley. Lat all littee."

How they terminated the bargain Ben never took the pains to learn.

The woman and the Chinaman wrangled on for some time, but he was interested in but one thing.

That the girl alluded to as having been sent to San Francisco was no other than Fanny Brooks he did not doubt, and his only object now was to discover to what part of San Francisco she had been sent, and his mind was made up at once that he must make a trip to the Pacific Coast without delay.

But the first thing to be done was to seek out and have an interview with this woman called P'izen Kate and through bribery or any other possible method, learn for certain whether the girl had actually been sent to this place.

He listened meanwhile, however, for any further allusion to the girl, but that portion of the discussion was dropped for the one of more importance to the disputants.

Finally the matter was settled between them, and the woman arose to go.

Ben then turned quickly to Old Stump and whispered:

"Is there any way of getting into that room from this side?"

The old man was doubtless astonished at the absence of dialect from the detective's speech, for he stared at him stupidly for a moment before replying.

"Nope," he finally drawled.

"No way of getting through at all?"

"Not from dis side. De on'y way's ter go roun' in Bayard street an' come in dat way."

"This building runs through to Bayard, does it?"

"Yep."

"Then, I must get round there in time to head them off. I must see and have a talk with that old woman if it costs a leg."

And without waiting for any more talk he plunged back through the dark passage, pushed open the door and made his way through the gambling den and into the next passage, and so on out into the shop, and from that into the street.

He had waited for nobody, and had no other thought than to head off the old woman before she escaped him.

It did not take him long to reach Bayard street, but when he got there it occurred to him for the first time that he did not know the number of the house.

CHAPTER VI.

PURCHASING INFORMATION.

WHEN Ben discovered the mistake he had made in not ascertaining the number of the building before going round the block, he stopped and looked about in a state of perplexity.

Then it was that he found that Billy was at his heels.

"Hullo, Billy!" he cried. "I'd forgotten all about you in my haste and excitement. Have you been with me all the time?"

"Pretty much, although it kept me hustling to keep up with you part of the time," replied his friend.

"Well, my haste has all been for nothing," sighed Ben.

"How is that?"

"I don't know the number of the house from this side."

Billy reflected a moment, and then said:

"Why, it must be along a little further, don't you think so?"

"I haven't the least idea," returned Bob. "I was a fool to have come round without first finding out."

"Well, let's walk along a little further. We may hit it."

"Yes, we may as well, as it is too late to go round to Pell street again now."

And the two friends walked along for some distance.

They were just passing an innocent looking laundry, the last place in the world where any one would have looked for evil doing.

It was dark within, and the detective supposed the place was closed for the night.

He would have passed on without paying any attention to the place had it not been for one circumstance.

He heard subdued voices within, and one of them was strangely familiar to him.

He stopped to listen.

There could be no doubt of it.

It was the voice of P'izen Kate.

"They're there!" he whispered to Billy, at the same time pulling him back into the shadow of the building.

"Who?" inquired his friend.

"P'izen Kate, as they call her, and the Chinaman."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure? Listen!"

Billy listened, but unfortunately they had ceased talking.

He looked at his companion for an explanation, but before he could give it, the door to the shop opened and three persons came out.

In spite of the dimness of the light Ben could see that it was Hung Lee and the two old women who were with him in the room next to the passage where our friends were concealed.

When the trio reached the sidewalk they exchanged a few words, and then Hung Lee went one way and the women another.

"Let us follow them," whispered Ben. "I must find out where that woman lives and have a talk with her. I believe that half the battle will be won when that is accomplished."

By this time the women had got some distance in advance, and Ben deeming it safe to follow, emerged from the shadow and started in pursuit.

The woman only went as far as Chatham street where they boarded a Third avenue car for up-town.

Ben and his companion also got on the car, and the former managed to get a seat alongside of the woman called P'izen Kate.

He did this with the hope of overhearing something in the conversation she was keeping up with the other woman that would serve as a clue to the whereabouts of Fanny.

But in this he was disappointed.

Although the two women talked incessantly and principally about the nefarious business they were carrying on, they never once alluded to that one matter.

Meanwhile the car rolled on up the Bowery and in time entered Third avenue.

At Fourth street the women alighted and Ben followed their example.

They turned toward Second avenue, but only continued in that direction to the middle of the block, where they turned in at the entrance of a tenement-house.

The neighborhood was a pretty respectable one, and Ben wondered if the women's neighbors had any idea what kind of people they were.

Meanwhile they had opened the door with a night key and entered.

The detective remained in the vestibule until they had time to reach their flat, and then rung a bell at random.

The door was promptly opened by somebody, and Ben and Billy went in. But they were as much at sea as if they did not know the number of the house, for they hadn't the least idea which floor the flat to which the women had gone was located.

However, they knew that they had gone up-stairs, so the detective and Billy walked up one flight, and then looked about them.

Just then some one somewhere on a floor above called down to know who was there.

Without answering Ben climbed on up until he came to where the person was, hoping that it might be one of the women.

But in this he was disappointed.

He found a woman, but not the right one, and she was in a bad humor because her bell had been rung at that time of night.

Ben apologized for the mistake, and then asked her if she knew what flat the women (describing them as he could) lived.

This offended her worse than ever, and after delivering a piece of her mind in which she was nowise choice of her language, she went inside and slammed the door to show her indignation.

"Now we are in for it!" muttered the detective. "How are we ever going to find that flat?"

"There is but one way that I see," said Billy.

"How is that?"

"Commence on the first floor and knock at every door in the building."

"That is our only chance, I suppose. But we'll be lucky if we don't get our heads knocked off before we are through."

Acting upon the suggestion, Ben knocked at the nearest door, which was directly opposite the door which the indignant woman had just entered.

The door was promptly opened, and to the detective's delight the woman called P'izen Kate stood before him!

"What do you want?" she demanded in a not unpleasant voice.

Ben was prompt with his answer, as he knew he need to be.

"I desire to speak to you privately," he replied.

She looked at him a little surprised, but finally asked:

"What is it?"

"It is a matter that must be discussed in strict private," he answered, "and something that is of great interest to yourself."

She looked him over curiously for a moment or two, and then said:

"Come in."

Ben stepped inside, but the woman was about to shut Billy out when the detective spoke up in his behalf and informed her that he was a friend.

She conducted them into a small but neatly furnished parlor, and Ben was surprised to find that she was alone.

However, guessing that the other woman had gone into another room, he introduced the object of his visit at once.

"I have learned," he began in a cool, practical tone of voice, "that you had something to do with the abducting of a young girl who has been missing for two or three days. She is a blonde, rather pretty, and her name is Fanny Brooks. Now, I want you to tell me all you know about her present whereabouts, and you shall be well paid for it. I happen to know that you did not get much out of the deal before, and this will help you to get your money back."

He had spoken thus, determined to explain his position as fully as possible before allowing her to interrupt him, as he knew the fatality of any misunderstanding at the outset.

Nevertheless, the woman started, and exclaimed:

"You're a detective!"

Ben laughed.

"Do I look like one?" he said.

She looked him over, and then replied in a milder tone:

"Not exactly, but what do you want to know about the girl for?"

"I have a very good reason," rejoined Ben.

"She is my sister."

"Ah!"

And the woman settled into a seat near him.

"And you say you're willing to pay good money for the information?" she went on.

"A fair price—yes."

"What do you call a fair price?"

"That depends upon the amount of information I receive."

"Well, somewhere near how much are you willing to pay?" she persisted.

"And not give you away to the police?"

This was a set-back.

"Oh," she said, "if there's going to be anything of that kind, we can't deal."

"Perhaps you think I don't know anything about the case? If you do, you are mistaken. I know all about it."

CHAPTER VII.

A HORRIBLE DISCOVERY.

THE woman looked at Ben with a perplexed countenance.

She evidently did not know whether to believe his statement or not.

He had just denied being a detective, and now he had asserted that he knew all about her crooked business.

At length she concluded to make the best of it, for she burst out laughing and asked:

"Well, how much do you know, young man, and how did you get hold of the information?"

"I know this much, if no more," he answered, "that you abducted the girl and sold her to Hung Lee for fifteen dollars. You made nothing on the deal from the fact that you had to give the girl five, and a policeman ten to keep away until she was got out of sight."

The woman laughed uproariously at this statement.

"I see how it is," she laughed. "You've been talking with Hung Lee."

"No, I have not," he protested.

"You must have."

"Why?"

"Nobody else could have given you that information."

"Perhaps there are some others."

"Impossible."

"How so?"

"It was a bit of guff I gave Hung Lee for the purpose of driving a bargain with him."

"There was really nothing in it, then?"

"Nothing whatever."

"You gave the girl nothing?"

"Not a cent. Why should I?"

"I didn't know but it was necessary in order to induce her to go with you."

"No, that is not my method."

"You don't use money, then?"

"Not unless the girl is very simple."

"But this girl was too bright for that, eh?"

"Yes."

"How did you manage her?"

"Very easy. You see she had lost her way and it was raining. I saw her wandering about, so I took her under my charge, invited her to a place which I told her was my home, gave her a cup of tea and promised to take her home afterward."

"But she had her little brother with her. What did you do with him?"

"Oh, I sent him home."

"What did you do with the girl after that?"

"As soon as she drank the tea she went to sleep, and knew no more until she was on her way to Frisco."

Ben could hardly restrain himself at this horrible revelation, delivered as it was in the most matter-of-fact manner, and more than once he was compelled to frown at Billy to restrain him from flying at the hardened old wretch.

However, Ben controlled his feelings as well as he could, and continued:

"You drugged her, eh?"

"Yes, that is the easiest way with such as she."

"You do a regular business with this Chinaman, do you not?"

"Oh, I make out pretty well," she said with a light laugh. "I have no reason to complain."

"Where is this girl now?"

"Which one?"

"Fanny Brooks."

"Oh, I sha'n't tell you that for nothing," she protested.

"Very well, how much do you want for the information?"

The woman reflected a moment, and then said:

"I want a hundred dollars for that bit of information."

"You shall have it," replied Ben. "But I must be convinced that you are telling me the truth before I pay the money."

"You cannot take my word, then?"

"Certainly not."

"Why?"

"Because I have already caught you in one lie."

"What was that?" she asked, coolly.

"I heard you tell Hung Lee that it had cost you every cent of the fifteen dollars you had received from him to procure the girl, and now you tell me that you were merely telling him that for the purpose of driving a better bargain with him."

"You heard me tell him that?" she gasped, staring at him in astonishment.

"I did."

"I don't believe you!" she affirmed, stoutly.

"And yet you admit having told him?"

"Yes."

"How, then, do you suppose I obtained the information?"

"He told you."

"Is that likely, when he knows that any such information would lay him liable to be sent to the Penitentiary?"

She was puzzled, but finally concluded to abandon any attempt at a solution of the problem, and returned to the question of the money he was to pay her for the information he desired.

"Well, what are you going to do about the information?" she inquired.

"I'll tell you what I'll do. I will give you ten dollars now as a pledge of good faith, and as soon as I find that what you have told me is the truth, you shall have the balance—ninety dollars."

"That won't do me," she replied, stoutly. "I must have the money in advance or there is no trade."

"Very well," said Ben, rising. "I have sufficient evidence against you to send you over the road, and I shall not hesitate to use it without delay!"

With that he started for the door.

But as he did so, the woman stepped quickly back through a door leading into a rear room and gave a shrill whistle.

Ben knew too well what the signal meant, and quickened his pace toward the door.

He had just reached it and was about to put his hand on the knob, when a burly ruffian sprung through the back door and confronted him.

Ben feared nothing on his own account, as he was so near the door that he could easily make his escape, even if he could not have defended himself, which he was amply able to do, but that was not the worst of it.

In coming into the room the bully had come in between the young detective and his friend, and Billy was cut off from the door.

It was therefore necessary to either fight or sacrifice his friend, and he could not think of doing the latter.

In the mean time the bully was glaring at him in a ferocious manner, and finally growled:

"So ye're a-goin' to give us away to the perlice, are ye?"

Instead of replying, Ben beckoned his friend to slip past the ruffian and reach the door.

But the fellow noticed the silent communication, and just as Billy attempted to pass him, the bully grasped him by the shoulder and hurled him back.

This was the most fortunate thing that could have happened for Ben.

While the fellow was thus engaged, he took advantage of the situation to plant a sledge-hammer blow under the bully's jaw that sent him reeling to one side.

Taking advantage of the situation, Billy sprung forward and was again about to pass the fellow, when he recovered sufficiently from the blow he had received to strike out, knocking Billy down.

But he had no more than done so when Ben came at him again, and this time delivered him one on the jugular that staggered him back to the other side of the room.

He did not fall, however.

It was like striking a bull, so powerful was the ruffian.

This gave Billy a chance to recover his feet, though, and when the bully came at him again, the boy delivered him a stinger on the nose that made the claret spurt.

But it only had the effect of maddening him, and he returned to the charge with renewed energy.

He aimed a blow at Billy which would have laid him out had it reached him, but it did not.

The boy was agile enough to parry the blow, and at the same instant Ben let drive with a catapult blow again on the jugular, and this time it had the proper effect.

The big brute dropped to the floor as if he had been shot through the heart.

Then without waiting for further developments, the detective hustled his friend toward the door, opened it, and they were soon making their way out of the building.

Taking a car on Third avenue, they were a short time afterward back in Bayard street at the point where they had seen the women come out of the building, and there on the steps, apparently lifeless, lay Old Stump.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SLIGHT CLUE.

BEN'S first impression was that the tramp was asleep, and naturally concluded that the old fellow had managed to get enough whisky to make him drunk.

"There is no such thing as doing any business with him to-night," he observed carelessly. "I was in hopes of getting a little more information out of him. I also wanted him to go with us to a police justice in the morning to add his evidence so that I

could procure a warrant for that woman's arrest. But it is no go."

And he was about to pass on.

But Billy, who had taken a closer view of the prostrate man, stopped him.

"Hold on, old fellow!" he called out. "There is something more than sleep the matter with this man."

"I have no doubt," laughed Ben. "He's doubtless as drunk as a beast; but that is his normal condition. Come on."

"But," persisted Billy, "there's something more than drunkenness here."

"What is it?" questioned the detective, still carelessly, turning back for the purpose of humoring his friend rather than because he took any interest in the matter.

"Look!" cried Billy, stooping over and peering into the old man's face.

"What is it?" repeated Ben, also bending over to get a better view in the dim light.

The next instant he sprung back and turned very pale.

"My God!" he cried. "The man is dead!"

"That is what I think," rejoined Billy. "But maybe he has died of natural causes."

"I don't believe it," objected the detective. "People rarely die in this neighborhood from natural causes. He's been murdered!"

"Do you think so?"

"I am almost positive of it. And I'll bet I can put my finger on the man that did it."

"Hung Lee?"

"Undoubtedly. I see through it all. The poor old chap followed me around here to get the money I promised him, and was unfortunate enough to meet the Chinaman. The latter suspected that the old man had been giving him away, no doubt, and they had a row."

"And Hung Lee killed him?"

"Yes."

"But," objected Billy, "there is no sign of blood."

"Is that so?"

And Ben stooped to examine the prostrate man more closely.

"You are right," he assented. "I wonder what it can mean."

"My opinion is that he died from alcoholism or something of the kind," interposed his friend.

"I don't believe it."

With that he drew a match from his pocket, struck it and held it close to the old man's face.

He also passed the light about in different directions, but there was not a drop of blood to be seen.

"Don't you see?" interjected Billy. "If he had been murdered there would be blood."

Ben reflected a moment.

"Not necessarily," he finally said. "I remember now that Hung Lee used to be a Highbinder."

"What's that?"

"A Chinese organization something like the Mafia among the Italians, whose object is to put undesirable people out of the way."

"Do you mean to say they have methods of putting people out of the way without spilling any blood?"

"Yes, that is one of their strong points."

"How do they do it?"

"They have various ways of doing it. Sometimes they stab a man in the back with an instrument so slender as to leave scarcely any mark on the exterior and the victim bleeds internally; at other times they slip up behind the victim and thrust a handkerchief under his nose, the handkerchief being saturated with some deadly drug that produces instant death and leaves no traces behind."

"This is the way this man has been treated then, if he has been murdered at all," remarked Billy.

Just then a policeman came along and stopped.

"What's up?" asked the officer.

Bowery Ben in Chinatown.

"Here's a dead man," replied the detective, "and in my opinion there has been foul play."

The policeman shot the slide of his lantern and held it down to the man's face.

"Hello!" he muttered, "it's Old Stump!"

"Yes, I know," returned Ben. "And in my opinion he's been the victim of foul play."

"Not on your life, young feller!" sneered the policeman. "Whisky's the only thing that's given him foul play."

"You may be right," insisted Ben, "but it is more likely he's been murdered."

"What makes ye think so?"

"Certain circumstances."

"Mebby you know something about this case?" growled the officer.

"Maybe I do," returned Ben, firmly.

"In that case, I'll just take you along as a valuable witness, if not an accessory."

But as he finished the sentence the policeman raised his lantern so that its light fell upon the young detective's face.

He started and stared.

"Hullo!" he gasped. "If it ain't Bowery Ben!"

"Right you are, Casey," laughed Ben.

"That changes the face of matters somewhat," continued the policeman. "How'd ye come to find this chap, Ben?"

The detective related the account of his adventure with the Chinamen, his meeting with Old Stump, and so on, and concluded with the observation:

"In my opinion the old fellow came around to find me, and meeting with Hung Lee, the latter suspected that Old Stump had been doing him dirt, as they say among these people, and let him have it."

"But where's the blood, Ben?" queried the policeman, putting the light down to the dead man's face once more. "There can't be murder without blood."

"No poison, eh?" smiled Ben.

"Oh, yes," growled the other with a supercilious jerk of the head, "but if he had been poisoned he wouldn't be here. Besides, you say you think he followed you round here, and met the Chinaman. How could he give his victim poison on the street?"

"Very easily. These Chinese Highbinders—"

"Oh!" interrupted the officer. "Is Hung Lee a Highbinder?"

"That is what they say."

"That alters the case."

"Yes, those fellows have methods of doing this sort of thing that white men never dreamed of."

"Well," interposed the policeman, "I must call an ambulance and have the fellow taken to the hospital or the police station, whichever the surgeon thinks proper."

And off he strode.

Ben and his friend waited for the arrival of the ambulance, and, as the body was taken to the police station, they accompanied it.

Upon arriving there the old man's pockets were emptied, as is the custom, and at his own request the young detective was permitted to look over some papers which were found therein.

The papers were of no consequence for the most part, but there was one item that interested him.

This was a very dirty business card upon which something had been written in a very fine feminine hand.

He might possibly have passed over even that had not Billy, who was looking over his shoulder, whispered excitedly

"My God! It's Fanny's handwriting!"

Ben then read the writing, which was no easy matter, owing to the filthy state of the card and the fact that the pencil writing had been badly rubbed by being carried in the tramp's pocket.

However, with Billy's aid he finally managed to decipher and make a copy of it.

It read as follows:

"DEAR BROTHER OR FRIENDS, or whoever may find this —

"I write this in the hope that it will be found by somebody who cares for me, and will try to rescue me. I am in the hands of a bad woman who pretended to befriend me, and what my Fate will be God alone can tell. I have heard a conversation—or part of one—between the woman and a Chinaman, and overheard the word San Francisco, and I fear that I am to be sent there. I give this into the care of a person who has promised to deliver it to my friends, and given him all the money I had to do it. I pray God he may keep his trust, though I fear he won't. Good by.

FANNY."

After making a copy of the note, Ben returned the original, together with the other papers, to the police sergeant, and then with his friend left the station.

"Well, what do you make out of it?" asked Billy as they walked along.

"It proves two facts," replied Ben. "First, that Old Stump was a traitor, and second, that the old woman lied when she said that Fanny was unconscious from the time she drank the tea."

CHAPTER IX.

MISLEADING CLUES.

It was now past midnight, and thinking that nothing more could be done that night, Ben thought he might as well go home.

Billy was also anxious to get home, as he was compelled to get to the office at an early hour in the morning.

He continued to ruminate on the subject of their late conversation, however, and after walking some distance in silence, resumed:

"But may not sister have written the note before she drank the tea, Ben?"

"I was just thinking of that myself," returned the detective. "But from what the old woman said, I inferred that she had given Fanny the tea very soon after enticing her into the house."

"Yes, I thought the same," said Billy. "But sister may have been left alone for awhile—the entrance of the Chinaman, for instance—and took advantage of the old woman's absence to write the note."

"How could she have suspected that she was a prisoner at the time?" objected Ben.

"She may have guessed as much from the conversation she overheard between the woman and the Chinaman."

"In that case, is it not strange that she should have been willing to drink the tea?"

"You are right, Ben. I hadn't thought of that."

"Another thing, if she had just been enticed into the old woman's den, how could she have had a chance to see Old Stump?"

"You are right," exclaimed Billy. "I tell you it takes a detective to work out these nice points. There is no doubt that the old woman lied in this case as in the one about having to pay Fanny and the policeman. But do you really believe Old Stump was a traitor, as you at first suspected?"

"There is no doubt of it. If he had desired to deliver the note there was nothing to hinder him from doing so."

"Perhaps he did not know where to find us."

"In that case he would not have been to blame, but there was no reason why he should not have delivered it to me when he met me, whereas he did not so much as mention the fact that he had received the note."

"Perhaps," persisted Billy, seemingly determined, as was consistent with his unsuspicious nature, to make out as good a case as possible for the old man, "perhaps he was afraid."

"Of what?"

"You know how terrified he was at the thought of Hung Lee learning about his treachery to him."

"I remember."

"Well, perhaps he was afraid the note might in some way fall into the hands of the Chinaman."

"There is a possibility of that. At the same time, inasmuch as he trusted me far enough to take me into the entry where I heard the conversation between the Chinaman and the old woman, why should he have been afraid to trust me in this matter?"

"That I do not pretend to explain," said Billy, who was getting cornered by his more acute friend, "however, as you know, there is no one so suspicious as a natural traitor."

"You are right, there, Billy. You can never trust a man who will betray others, and as you say, there is no one so suspicious. Being dishonest himself, he suspects every one else."

"However, you will investigate the old fellow's case, won't you, and ascertain whether he really was murdered or not?"

"Oh, certainly. It will be directly in my line. Perhaps in the investigation of his case some light may be shed upon the other, for I am confident that if the old fellow was murdered, it was in consequence of his infidelity to the Chinaman."

"How about having the Chinaman arrested?"

"I shall attend to that in the morning. You had better meet me at Justice Burger's office at about nine, and we'll get a warrant for Hung Lee and one for the woman."

"Won't it be necessary to know her name?"

"No. It would be better, of course, but I can swear out a warrant, with you as a witness, leave the name blank and have it filled in after she is under arrest."

"You might have it filled out with the name 'P'izen Kate,'" suggested Billy.

"Yes, I can do that."

"How about going to San Francisco?"

"We'll talk of that later. I want to get more evidence that she has actually been taken there before undertaking the trip. Somehow, I begin to think the San Francisco story is a ruse to throw us off the scent."

"Do you?"

"I do, indeed."

"Well, it would be in keeping with these rascals."

"You're right."

They had walked quite a distance up the Bowery, forgetting, apparently, in their abstraction to take a car, but at length they took one and rode as far as the junction of the Bowery and Third avenue together, where Billy alighted, as he lived in Second avenue, not far from Sixth street, while Ben rode on up a little further, as he had a room in Tenth street near Third avenue.

After his companion had left him the detective fell into a state of deep meditation, and, as was his habit when deeply absorbed, he allowed his eyes to wander about the car, examining in an abstracted way, each face that came in his way.

As a matter of fact, he seldom gave any thought to the faces he stared at on such occasions, in some cases even staring for a minute or two at an acquaintance without recognizing him.

But on this occasion there was a slight exception.

As his eyes wandered from one face to another they finally fell upon a group of four Chinamen.

They were huddled together, as is their habit, and chattering away like so many magpies.

This would not have attracted his attention on ordinary occasions, and perhaps would not have done so on this had it not been that they kept watching him in a manner that led him to believe that their conversation concerned himself.

His curiosity was aroused at once, and, although he affected not to do so, he kept a close watch upon the Celestials.

The more he watched them the more fully

convinced he became that his first impression was correct.

They never for an instant removed their eyes from his face and he could not help believing the animated chatter they kept up related to him.

Ben was in no sense a coward, but as he watched these ill-favored, villainous-looking Orientals, and read murder in their faces, as he imagined, he could not repress a qualm.

He knew the cowardly instincts of the race, and knew only too well, that they would scruple at nothing if they bore a grudge against a person.

He knew, too, that if the secret organization known as the Highbinders existed in New York, as it did in San Francisco—and he had good reason for believing it did—there was little chance for escaping its fury, and he also knew that he had already given them just cause for desiring to put him out of the way.

"A few more blocks will test [the question]," he mused, "for there I shall get off, and if they really mean anything they will also get off."

A few minutes later Ben jumped from the car and, having reached the sidewalk, watched for his supposed spies.

But to his surprise and gratification, they did not get off the car, so after watching for some time, he turned his face homeward and walked on with a light heart, at the same time censuring himself a little for his groundless suspicion.

The house in which his room was located was about the middle of the block, and it did not take him long to reach it.

The neighborhood was none of the best, and the street at this point poorly lighted as many of the cross streets are.

He had walked on leisurely, and when he reached the entrance to the house in which his room was located he stopped for a few moments to cool off, as the night was warm, before ascending to his room.

He had not stood there more than a minute when his attention was attracted by the approach of a group of men from the opposite direction from which he had come.

Some inexplicable premonition told him that they were enemies, and he stepped back in the recess of the doorway where he was concealed in the shadow.

A moment later the men came on up and stopped in front of the house.

He then saw that they were Chinamen.

It was too dark to tell whether they were the same ones he had seen in the car or not, but he had no doubt they were, and waited for developments.

The four Chinamen chattered away excitedly for some moments, and then one of them approached the door, leaving the other three on the sidewalk.

The fellow did not enter the door, however, but appeared to be pasting something on the side of the door-jamb, after which he returned to his friends on the sidewalk.

CHAPTER X.

THE WARNING.

THE detective waited for further developments, but was somewhat disappointed, for there were none.

As soon as the single Chinaman had performed the operation, whatever it was, at the side of the door and returned to his friends another excited conversation followed which lasted for some minutes, after which they went away, this time in the direction of Third avenue.

Ben then emerged from his hiding and examined the door jamb.

He found, as he expected, a paper posted there.

As the paste was still wet, he had no difficulty in pulling it down, and when he held it to the light, discovered it to be written in Chinese characters.

"This is strange," he mused. "What can it mean?"

Then he thought of the Highbinders, which he had heard a good deal about on the Pacific Coast, and made up his mind at once that this was a warning from this secret society.

He would have given a good deal just then to have been able to read the language, or even to have had poor Old Stump present, as he could have read the mysterious paper for him.

He puzzled over the queer document for some time before deciding what to do.

There was one Chinaman with whom he was on terms of familiarity, so far as a white man can ever become familiar with the race.

This fellow, Hap Kee by name, kept a laundry in Third avenue, not far from Ben's place, and he had no doubt he would interpret the strange message for him. But it was now nearly two o'clock and the laundryman would be in bed.

Could he wait till morning?

It would be a terrible suspense, but there appeared to be no help for it.

All these reflections had flashed through his mind in a few seconds, and then he made up his mind to do something which he wondered that he had not thought of before.

That was to follow the four Chinamen and find out, if possible, where they belonged.

They could not be far, he thought, and he bounded from the stoop and started off on a run in the direction they had gone.

So rapid was his gait that he had the good fortune to catch sight of the fugitives as they were turning into Third avenue.

They turned down-town as they reached the corner and he had no doubt they contemplated taking the Elevated train at Ninth street.

Bob followed along at a respectful distance, taking care that the fugitives should not see him.

He was not mistaken in his guess as to where they were going, for a few minutes later they climbed the stairs to the Elevated station.

Ben was right after them and took the same car.

As they were not expecting him, he managed to slip into a seat without being seen by the Chinamen, and then to prevent recognition, he drew his collar up about his neck, pulled his hat down over his eyes and affected to be asleep.

The plan was eminently successful, and the Chinamen never once glanced in his direction.

They kept up their usual chatter until the train reached Chatham Square, and they all arose simultaneously to leave the car.

Then for the first time he had a good look at them, and discovered that they were in reality the same he had seen in the horse-car going up.

He wondered greatly that they should have been able to get off the horse-car, walk around the block and reach his house in so short a time, and for this reason he almost doubted the evidence of his own vision when he saw they were the same.

As soon as they were well past him he arose and followed them out of the car.

They made their way toward Pell street, and he still shadowed them.

He guessed that they would go to Hung Lee's place, and he was not mistaken.

Hung Lee's shop was in darkness, but the men were admitted, without so much as knocking, it seemed, which led the detective to believe the door had been left unfastened for their reception in case they should be compelled to enter in a hurry.

There appeared nothing more for him to do now, so making a mental note of what the four men looked like, he turned back toward Chatham Square again, and was soon on his way home once more.

There was little sleep for the young detective that night.

Between the exciting events of the day and evening, and the mysterious message,

he had too much to occupy his mind to permit sleep to visit his pillow till far along toward daylight.

He was up at an early hour, however, and as soon as he was dressed, and without waiting for breakfast, he called upon his Chinese friend Hap Kee for the purpose of having him translate the hieroglyphics on the slip of red paper which he had found posted on the door-post.

He experienced some misgivings as he entered the place, for the thought occurred to him that perhaps he was making a mistake in coming to this man after all, as he might, for aught he knew, belong to this same society.

Indeed, he had suddenly grown suspicious of every individual with almond eyes and a pigtail he came across.

However, he had no other recourse, and he was bound to learn the contents of the secret message at all hazards, and so walked on into the laundry.

Hap Kee was busily engaged in rolling up clothes ready for ironing, and squirting water out of his mouth over them as he did so.

He looked up and grinned when he saw Ben, and in his pigeon English said:

"Glood-mlornee."

"Good-morning, Hap Kee," returned Ben, pleasantly.

"Yo' wantee yo' shlult, Blen?" asked the Chinaman.

"Yes, Hap Kee, but I have—"

"Yo' glot ticket, Blen?" interrupted the laundryman

"Yes, I have a ticket, Hap Kee, but I have something else—"

"You no glit shlult somelt ells, Blen. No ticket, no shlult."

"Will you hold your clack till I tell you what I want?" demanded the detective impatiently.

"Whalt yo' call clalk, Blen?" queried the astonished Chinaman. "glot no clalk."

"Yes, you have a deuce of a lot of it, my friend," grumbled Ben. "Now listen. Here is a document I received last night which I wish you to decipher. There," he pursued, handing the Chinaman the slip of paper, "what do you make of that?"

Hap Kee took the paper, knit his brows and began to look at it.

The next instant he dropped it, raised his hands above his head and assumed an expression of the utmost horror.

"Gleat Glod!" he ejaculated.

Hap Kee did not possess a very extensive English vocabulary, but like most foreigners, he had contrived to pick up a smattering of the profanity, and this was a part of it.

He knew that it was the correct exclamation in cases of extreme surprise or horror, and so employed it on this occasion.

But there was no doubt about the genuineness of his consternation, for his saffron complexion became the color of chalk and his small almond-shaped eyes were extended to their fullest limits.

"What's the matter, Hap Kee?" questioned Ben, striving, in spite of his own feelings of dread, to make light of the matter.

"Whalt mlattee?" echoed the Chinaman. "Yo' glit klilled, Blen, allee slame, blim, blim!"

And he went through the pantomime of stabbing a man.

"You don't tell me?" cried Ben, still in a jocular spirit.

"Las! You' glit klilled lite way!"

"When?" smiled the detective.

"Tonil-et!"

"To-night, eh? That's good! By the way, who is going to do the pleasant job for me?"

"Look!" cried Hap Kee, pointing his trembling finger at the paper, which he had again picked up.

"Yes, I see," laughed Ben. "Some un-

fortunate spider has been mashed on there, but what does that amount to?"

"Yo' no slee?" gasped the laundryman with wild staring eyes.

"Certainly I see, as I told you, and it looks just like a beautiful poem you sent me the other day on a wash ticket. What the blazes is it all about, anyway?"

"Highbinders!" gasped the Chinaman.

"Oh, is that all? I didn't know but some Chinese poet had sent me a spring poem, and that I would be compelled to read it. What do these gentlemen propose to do, anyway, and what is their motive?"

Of course this was all Greek to poor John, and the detective was compelled to enter into a delicate and painstaking ordeal to get the fellow to understand what he meant, and in turn dig out what the real meaning of the document was.

In the end he managed to learn that in accordance with an order from the chief of the Highbinders, not only the young detective, but all his relatives were to be exterminated in as short a space of time as convenient, and that he in particular was to be put out of the way that same night.

CHAPTER XI.

A HEROIC EFFORT.

HAVING learned the purport of the mysterious message, Ben left the laundry, still in a jocular mood, much to the astonishment and mystification of the Chinaman.

He evidently expected to see the young man turn pale or perhaps even weep.

He could not understand the temperament of a man who could laugh under such circumstances.

But he did not know Ben Gaylord.

He was not aware that he could have laughed just the same if he had been standing in front of half a dozen cannons.

This apparently happy mood did not indicate his feelings by any means.

For, although he was as brave as man ever was, he possessed none of the quality known as foolhardy bravery.

He had simply learned to put a good face on matters, knowing that appearances often carried a man far beyond his natural prowess.

As a matter of fact, the young man was far from being at his ease, after this blood-curdling revelation, for he knew too well the real danger he was in.

Nevertheless, he cast it off as well as he could and proceeded about his business.

His first move was to visit the police justice's office for the purpose of procuring warrants for the arrest of Hung Lee and the woman called 'P'izen Kate.'

There he met Billy according to agreement, and the two proceeded to state their case to the judge, who, when he had heard their story, promptly issued the desired warrants.

When these were procured the two friends left the court together.

Ben was on the point once of telling his friend of his adventure, but upon second thought concluded not to.

It would only serve to harrow his feelings and render him apprehensive of the fate of his friend, he thought.

Neither would he allow Billy to accompany him on his next expedition, for fear that the Highbinders would attempt to put into execution their threat, and, supposing Billy to be a relative, mete out the same fate to him.

This will give the reader a slight insight into the noble, unselfish nature of the young detective.

Another view of it may be had from the fact that he did not even report the fact of his peril to the chief of police, as almost any other man would have done, lest he should be thought a coward.

After taking leave of Billy and advising him to return to his office, Ben repaired to the police station where the body of poor Old Stump lay, with a view to attending the inquest which was to be held that morning.

The inquest was in progress and Ben was subpoenaed as a witness.

After all the evidence that could be gathered had been submitted the young detective told what he knew about the case, not omitting his suspicions that the man had met with foul play.

But it was of no avail.

An autopsy had been held, and the physician had decided that the man had died from alcoholism, and that settled it.

The opinion of a mere lad such as Ben was laughed at.

"A young and officious detective," sneered the doctor. "Wants to make a record, that's all. Well, I don't blame him so much, but he'll learn something before he's many years older."

"He'll learn better than to advance his opinions against old heads like ours," added the old detective, who had been "smelling" the case, as the professionals term it.

"Indeed he will," laughed the doctor.

And the two old wiseacres went off together to celebrate their wonderful knowledge in a "smile."

But all this cold water had no effect on Bowery Ben.

He was not the least shaken in his original theory, and was all the more determined to sift the case to the bottom and prove the older heads to be in the wrong.

If he should succeed in this, his fame was established, he realized, and went to work with renewed energy.

His next move was to call upon Superintendent Byrnes and request a detail of men to help him in making his arrests.

When that was done, he argued, half the battle would have been won.

The superintendent was surprised, first, that he had engaged upon the case on his own account, but not displeased; and second, that he had already made such progress.

"You shall have all the men you want, Ben," said the superintendent, "but are you sure you have the game run to earth?"

"Certainly, superintendent," he answered, confidently. "If I was not I wouldn't ask for the detail. All I have got to do in the case is to go to the shop of Hung Lee and arrest him, and in the other, go to the woman's flat."

"You think neither of them will expect you and elude you?"

"I don't imagine such a thing. Why should they? So far as the Chinaman is concerned, he does not even know that I am after him, and the woman, although she may expect that I will try to have her arrested, does not know that the young man who visited her last night is a detective."

"Very well. I hope for your success, my boy, but I'm afraid you are too confident."

And Ben discovered later that there was wisdom in the superintendent's words, for when, with his squad of policemen, he arrived on the ground, Hung Lee could nowhere be found. Nor could anybody be found who knew anything of his whereabouts.

Some of them suspected, however, that he had departed the night previous for San Francisco, as he had been talking for some time of going.

Of course Ben put no confidence in this story, but it opened his eyes to another theory, and that was that there was as little truth in the story about Fanny Brooks being taken to the Western metropolis.

Having failed in his first object, the detective took his men on another wild goose chase.

He took them up on Fourth avenue to the residence of P'izen Kate.

Having obtained admission to the building, the young detective mounted the stairs with a good deal of confidence, followed by the squad of policemen.

But when he knocked on the door there was no response.

Not put out at this apparent set-back, he repeated the knock, not once, but a dozen times, but all to no avail. Nobody came to the door.

"There is but one thing left us," he remarked to the sergeant.

"What's that?" asked the officer.

"Burst the door in," was the reply.

"It's little good it'll do you, in my opinion," volunteered the policeman.

"Why?"

"You won't catch them folks napping."

"What do you mean?"

"They've skedaddled, depend upon it."

"Perhaps you are right," admitted Ben, a little disheartened, "but we can do no more than try."

"That's true, and if you say so, down comes the door."

"Down with it!" cried Ben.

The sergeant began to bang at the door with his baton, but before he had struck many blows the janitress came tearing upstairs, saying:

"Don't smash the dure! If yez want to git in, Oi'll open it for yez wid the key."

The officer stepped back and he and the detective exchanged looks of mutual inquiry.

Before they had time to answer each other's mute questions in words, however, the impetuous janitress had the door open.

Ben was the first to peer in, and was quickly followed in the action by the sergeant.

Again they exchanged glances, this time of mutual surprise.

The flat was as bare as the day the carpenter had left it.

There was not a stick of furniture in sight.

"They moved out airy this mornin'," explained the janitress. "Phwat was there about them, annyway? Oi knowed they was a bad lot, but phwat was they afther doing, at all?"

Ben did not have time just then to answer the question.

He had business down-stairs, and went accordingly.

He was soon followed by the squad of men, and when they were on the sidewalk the sergeant said in a rather sarcastic tone, Ben thought:

"I guess we kin carry our game back in our vest pocket this trip, young man."

"Yes, they have given me the slip, that is a fact," admitted the boy, laughing, for he had recovered his spirits by this time. "But it'll do them no good. I'll be onto them again before they know it."

"Yes, yes," sneered the policeman. "That is the way all you fellows talk, but it is easier talking than doing, by a long shot."

As soon as Ben took leave of the policemen he returned to his room where he remained the rest of the day, and in the meantime he had formulated a plan of action which he felt confident would result in success. And he had resolved to go it alone from that out.

CHAPTER XII.

A NEW DEAL.

LATE in the afternoon Ben paid another visit to his friend the laundryman.

Hap Kee was surprised to see him, and exclaimed as soon as the young detective made his appearance:

"Hello, Blen! Highbinders no kill yelt?"

"No, Hap Kee, the Highbinders haven't done me up yet, and what I'm hoping for is that they never will."

"Whalt yo' wantee now, Blen?"

"I want you to help me out, Hap Kee."

"Hel-ep yo' outee? Whalet mean?"

"I'll tell you. I want you to lend me a suit of your Chinese clothes."

"Chlinee clothee? Whalet flor?"

"I want to make myself up as a Chinaman."

"No can."

"Why not?"

"No glot pig tail, no glot shavee head, Blen."

"Oh, I'll manage that all right."

"How yo' do, Blen? Shlavee head, makee pig-tail?"

"No, I have a better scheme than that."

"Whalet yo' glot, Blen?"

"A wig."

"Whalet yo' clall wig?"

Ben explained the mysterious substitute for real hair, and concluded by exhibiting a sample of the article, the wig which he wore on such occasions.

The Chinaman was greatly interested, and not a little horrified, for he was under the impression that the arrangement had been taken from the head of one of his countrymen.

But when Ben explained to him how it was made and that it was only a combination of horsehair and cork, he breathed easier.

"Me t'inkee he allee slame sklappee, all slame Injun takee on plains. Heep Chinee, long back, allee slame sklap have take by Injun. Yo' kno? Yo' lead, Blen?"

"Yes I read all about it," replied the detective.

Hap Kee alluded to the Chinese massacre in the mountains in the early days of the gold-digging, and which is known to every Chinaman you can meet.

"Lis no sklap, eh, Blen?" he went on, still a little suspicious, turning the wig over and examining it carefully.

"No, that is no scalp," replied Ben. "Now, there is another thing I want you to do for me," said the detective, after Hap Kee had furnished him with the clothes.

"Whalet lat?"

"I want you to go with me."

"Me glo?"

"Yes."

"Me no glo, Blen," objected the Chinaman stoutly.

"Why not?"

"Me no likee glit killee."

"There's no danger while you are with me. I'll protect you."

"Yo' no plotlect, Blen. No can. High-blinder kill quick, allee slame, bim, bim! No can plotlect, no can run, Blen. Allee slame flall dead!"

"You are afraid to go then?"

"Me no glo, Blen."

However, after a good deal of palaver, the laundryman spoke to one of his assistants, a young Chinaman who was something of a sport, and, unlike most of his race, a good deal of a fighter.

He had imbibed a good deal of the spirit of the class of Americans with whom he had come in contact on the East Side, and rather enjoyed a racket now and then.

He spoke fairly good English, too, another decided advantage.

His name was Sam Ling, and as soon as the scheme was proposed to him he was delighted.

"You blet I go, Blen," he said with a broad grin. "I bad man, all same 'Mellican man, fightee like deuce!"

"You're the stuff, Sam," returned the detective. "You'll probably have plenty of it to do. Come on."

"Where do you go, Blen?"

"I'm going to my room first, to make up, and then we'll pay a visit to Chinatown."

"All light. Wait till flix up."

"All right. I'll wait for you to fix up, but hurry up."

"Me hully."

And away he went.

In five minutes Sam returned with his best duds on and announced himself ready to travel.

They then went to the detective's room, where Ben proceeded to make himself up in accordance with the living model before him, and at the end of half an hour it would have

been hard to tell which was the real and which the spurious Chinaman.

"How do I look, Sam?" asked Bob.

"Allee same Chinee," was the enthusiastic reply. "Chinaman no can tell."

"That is sufficient," smiled Ben. "If a Chinaman can't tell the difference I am all right. Come."

Together they left the house.

It was eight o'clock when they reached the street, and to Ben's surprise the identical four Chinamen he had seen the night before were standing in front of the house.

They were evidently watching for him, and he experienced a slight qualm as he passed them.

They stared very hard at Sam Ling and muttered something in their own language.

When Bob and his companion were beyond earshot, he asked what they had said.

"They say, 'Whalt Chinee do here? No can tell.'"

"Is that all?"

"Yes, lat all."

"Oh, I thought they were talking about slugging me."

"No can tell," returned Sam, by which he probably meant that the four men did not recognize Ben.

Taking a down-town car, Ben and his Chinese friend were soon in that portion of the city which is mostly inhabited by Celestials.

They directed their steps toward Pell street, and as they approached the little shop which the detective knew from his previous experience was the entrance to the fan-tan den, he asked his companion:

"Are you acquainted with the proprietor of the fan-tan joint down here, Sam?"

"Wah Lang?" questioned Sam.

"Yes."

"Me know."

"Have you ever played in his place?"

"Heep lot. Losee heep lot mluney."

"We're all right, then."

"You glo there?"

"Yes."

"Play fan-tan?"

"A little, maybe. But the real object of my visit is to get into another place back of the gambling-den."

"Whalt there?"

"Don't you know?"

"No, me no know!"

"Well, I don't exactly know myself," smiled the detective, "but we shall see."

By this time they had reached the door of the shop and Ben allowed his companion to take the lead.

It should be stated that Ben had taken the precaution to arm his friend before starting, so that they were well prepared for all emergencies.

Sam walked in, and, after exchanging a word with the proprietor, the two went on back into the gambling-room.

The place was pretty well crowded as usual, and quite as nearly suffocating with smoke.

The manager recognizing Sam as a regular frequenter, paid no attention to him or his companion, and after loitering about for a few moments, they strolled back through the rear door into the dark passage.

"Whalt do here?" whispered Sam.

"I don't know yet," replied Ben. "I want to see what we can discover."

The place was very dark and Sam was a little nervous, but he said nothing and waited for developments.

Half an hour went by, and then voices were heard in the next room, as on the previous visit of the detective.

Presently a light sprung up and threw its rays through the cracks in the wall, and Ben peeped through.

CHAPTER XIII.

A GREAT SURPRISE.

THE sight that met the detective's gaze was a great surprise.

It was also, to some extent, a gratifying sight.

In the first place, there was not a Chinaman present.

But there were three women.

Two of them were P'izen Kate and the woman who had accompanied her the previous night, and the third one was Fanny Brooks.

The girl was pale and showed signs of recent weeping.

The old women were urging her to consent to something, the nature of which could not be understood for some time, as the parties spoke in an undertone, but after a while they gradually raised their voices to such a pitch that the detective could hear all they had to say.

"I cannot do it!" the girl was heard to say. "I had rather die than to be the wife of a Chinaman!"

"Oh, as to dying," sneered the old woman, "you can do that easy enough, and probably be glad to before I get through with you."

"But," protested the girl. "I—I—"

But she broke down, buried her face in her hands and gave herself up to sobbing.

"Now, now!" growled the old woman. "That is going to do you no good. Come, listen to reason. You object to the plan I have just stated, I will propose another."

"What is it, ma'am?" cried the girl, looking up quickly as if she was eager to accept any proposition rather than the one which had been offered, "what is it, ma'am?"

"Listen!" said the old woman.

She arose from her seat and went to the door, tried the knob, listened, and then came back.

"I guess it was nothing," she muttered.

"I was sure I heard some one. We must not be overheard in this, miss," she went on in an impressive tone. "What I am going to propose is for your good, and in offering it I am laying myself liable to—to—God knows what!"

She paused, and Fanny gazed wistfully, expectantly at her.

"So far," pursued the old woman, "I have kept you from him—"

"I know," interrupted Fanny eagerly, "and I cannot thank you enough for what you—"

"Silence!" commanded the old woman. "It will be time for you to talk when I am through. What I was about to say was, that so far I have kept you from him. In doing so I injured my own cause, but it was on account of no feelings of kindness I entertained for you. No, I had another object. I knew that you have relatives who are pretty well off, and believed that as soon as they discovered that the police were powerless to find you they would be willing to pay well for your ransom."

"Last night two young men came to my flat—that is, where I then lived—one of whom claimed to be your brother. I afterward discovered that the one claiming to be your brother was nothing of the kind, but a detective, while the other one—who had nothing to say—was your brother—"

"Billy?" gasped the girl.

"Don't interrupt me, miss!" snarled the woman. "You have another brother, I find, who will soon come into a good deal of property."

"Yes, yes, he will!" cried Fanny, eagerly.

"How much?" demanded the woman, coldly.

"Oh, I don't know. A great deal, though."

"Very well. How soon will he come into it?"

"Let me see," murmured the girl, excitedly. "Charles will be twenty-one in December."

"In December, eh?" echoed the old woman with an expression of cold calculation. "This is August. Four months."

"Yes, a little over four months, ma'am."

"But it will be some time after he comes of age before he will get the money. Let us say six months from date."

"Yes?" cried Fanny, eagerly.

"Now, how much of his fortune do you suppose he would be willing to sacrifice for the ransom of his sister?"

"Oh, I don't know, ma'm. All of it, maybe."

"Hardly all of it."

"Yes, yes, I know Charles would be willing to sacrifice every penny of it to get me out of trouble."

"I do not believe it, my girl. Men are not given to such remarkable unselfishness. If he would be willing to give up a quarter of it I should be surprised. But we sha'n't let him off so easy. If he loves his sister as a brother should love a sister, he should be willing to sacrifice at least half his fortune for her deliverance, rather than that you should become the wife of a Chinaman. Therefore we shall call it that."

"Yes'm."

"Now, my plan is this: You shall be taken to a place of safety, where there can be neither chance of escape or molestation from the Chinamen."

"There you shall be kept until such time as your brother comes into his fortune. In the mean time I shall have you write to him explaining the situation and the conditions upon which you will be set at liberty and restored to your family."

"But I won't be able to see any of them for six months!" protested Fanny.

"On the other hand, if you do not accept this proposition, you will never see them. Take your choice."

The girl broke down and wept again.

"It is very hard," she cried. "What have I done that I should suffer so much?"

"Nothing, except the crime of being beautiful," sneered the old woman, heartlessly. "But you should congratulate yourself upon being more fortunate than most girls who are merely pretty. You have the advantage of a rich brother who has or will have the power of rescuing you. Had you been simply good-looking like many girls, you would have been whisked away to San Francisco without ceremony. It was only because I knew of this money coming to your brother that I saved you from this fate."

The girl was silent, except for an occasional subdued sob that escaped her in spite of her efforts to keep them back.

The old woman watched her with a cold, half sneering expression, waiting, apparently for her decision.

Finally the other woman, who had held her peace up to that time, appeared to lose her patience, and spoke:

"I'd have an end of it, if I was you, Kate. If we wait here much longer that Chinaman will be in upon us, and then the fat will be in the fire."

"Yes," replied Kate, "we must get through with this at once. If Hung Lee finds out what we are about, there will be trouble. You see, so far he doesn't know anything about you. Though if he sees you he'll want to take you for the wife of some of his friends. Now, miss, you must make your mind at once."

"Cannot I see my mother just once before I am taken away?" pleaded the girl piteously.

"No," snarled the old woman, "you will be allowed to see nobody. What is your decision?"

"Oh, I cannot, I cannot!" cried the girl.

"Very well," snapped the old woman, jumping to her feet. "You shall accept the other alternative!"

At that moment there was a rattling at the door.

"My God!" gasped the woman. "Here he comes!"

"Who?" cried Fanny.

"Hung Lee!" replied the other.

"Oh, save me!" pleaded the girl.

"There is but one way," said Kate firmly.

"What is it?"

"To accept my proposition."

"Yes, yes," cried the half frantic girl.

"It shall be so."

"Get back here quick, then," muttered the woman.

As she spoke she hustled the girl into some place in the rear of the room, which Ben supposed to be a closet.

The old woman then went to the door and opened it.

Hung Lee came in, and it could be seen at once that he was not in a good humor.

"Whalet yo' keep me waitee long tlime, P'izen Kate?" he growled.

"Why, really I didn't hear you, Hung Lee," replied the woman pleasantly.

"Yo' tell heep blig lie, P'izen Kate. Yo' hlear allee tlime. Ye' no wantee clome. Yo' glot someblodee inslide. Me know."

"Really, you are mistaken, Hung Lee," pleaded the woman. "There is noboby here except Molly and me."

"Me find outee!" muttered the Chinaman, and he made toward the closet where Fanny was concealed.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE TOILS.

BEN was wild with excitement when he saw the Chinaman approaching the closet where the girl was concealed.

He knew that if he found her it would be all up with Fanny, unless she could be rescued in time.

He knew that if Hung Lee found her in his present state of rage he would lose no time in shipping her off to his Western friends, and the young detective was determined to save her if there was any possibility of such a thing.

But how was he to do it?

Old Stump had told him that there was no other way of getting into the next apartment than by going round to the next street.

But may not the old man have lied, as he had done in some other matters?

Ben was determined to find out for himself.

In making his preparations for the trip he had not neglected to provide himself with a lantern.

This he now drew from his pocket, struck a match and lighted.

He threw the glare of the lantern over the narrow passage in a hurried manner, for he realized that there was no time to be lost.

He allowed the lantern's glow to move along the frail partition, revealing, little by little every inch of it.

But at the end of a minute or so he had only made the discovery that Old Stump had told the truth.

There was no passage through the wall.

What was to be done?

Every instant only enhanced the danger of poor Fanny.

Not satisfied with his first search, he again passed the light along the wall, but with the same result.

There were two alternatives left, neither of them practicable, he feared.

One was to break through the wall, which was possible, as it was very frail, and the other was to run round to the Bayard street entrance.

The first was impracticable for the reason that the slightest sound would warn the inmates of the next room; and the second was equally impracticable for the reason that it would take him ten minutes to reach the other entrance, and probably by that time the parties would make their escape.

But a few minutes had elapsed while all this research and reflection was going on and Ben had about made up his mind that the only thing to be done was to try to reach the Bayard street entrance to the place in time to save the girl.

In his anxiety he had forgotten all about Sam Ling, and now for the first time since he had entered the place his eyes fell upon the Chinaman.

As soon as their eyes met Sam said:

"Whalet do?"

"I am at a loss what to do, Sam," replied Ben. "There appears to be no way of getting through into the next room, and before I can have time to reach the other entrance—"

But he got no further.

At that instant he was thrilled and shocked by a shrill shriek which emanated from the other room.

"Whalet lat?" gasped the Chinaman.

"My God! what is it?" questioned Ben, with a shudder.

The mystery was soon revealed, however, for both men put their eyes to the crack in the wall, and the sight that met their gaze froze their blood.

Hung Lee had found the girl and was at that instant dragging her from the closet by the hair.

The poor girl was nearly paralyzed with terror, while the Chinese brute's countenance wore the most devilish expression the young detective had ever witnessed.

In another instant he had brought the girl into the middle of the room, and in front of the woman.

"Now whalet slay, P'izen Kate?" he growled with a fiendish leer. "Yo' now slay yo' no lie? No glot noblody here, eh?"

The woman was paralyzed with terror.

She turned ghastly pale, and could utter no response.

"Now whalet yo' t'ink me do, P'izen Kate? Ye tinkee me no kll?"

"I intended to—to—" the woman attempted to stammer, but the Chinaman shut her off.

"Yo' bletter no lie me alle slame lalst tlime, P'izen Kate. Me kill!"

Meanwhile he had released his hold on the girl and she lay upon the floor, too much overcome with terror to rise.

The next instant the infuriated Celestial flew at the woman and clutched her by the throat with one hand, while in the other he grasped a dagger which gleamed in the light.

"Shloot, Ben!" whispered Sam excitedly. "No let kll!"

Bob had thought of this, and had even drawn his revolver, but in the position in which the two stood he could not hit the Chinaman without danger of killing the woman.

He was in a terrible quandary.

A moment's delay, and it would be too late.

And yet, what was to be done?

There appeared to be no help for the woman.

The young detective watched his opportunity with nervous eagerness.

The Chinaman, for some reason, delayed striking the fatal blow, and Ben could not guess the reason.

Then suddenly they swung about and he saw that the woman was struggling so heroically that the fiend had no chance to strike.

But as they swung about, the Celestial contrived to throw her back over the table, pinned her down, and raised his weapon to deliver the deadly blow.

Still the woman was between the detective and her would-be-assassin.

But as he raised his hand an opportunity offered.

Taking deliberate aim at the hand which held the deadly dagger, the detective fired.

The next instant the dagger flew into the air and the Chinaman released his victim and grasped his wounded hand.

He began to dance about the room and howl.

"Now our tlime," whispered Sam. "Blake down plettion. Glit in ulee loom. Tlakee him plis'ner. No can flightee now!"

But the Chinaman had only voiced the idea that had already entered the detective's head.

Indeed, he had already begun the work of tearing off the boards of the wall which separated him from the two people he was desirous of capturing.

Thrusting a knife he carried beneath the boards, he gave it a heroic wrench, and one of them came away.

This gave him a chance at the next, and as he grasped it Sam came to his assistance. Board after board was thus ripped off.

The Chinaman was in too much agony with his hand to notice what was going on, while the woman and Fanny were too much overwrought with terror to see or hear anything else.

Thus our friends worked on with perfect safety.

But a few minutes elapsed before a hole sufficiently large for them to crawl through had been made.

As soon as this was done the detective turned to his companion and Ben whispered:

"Now, Sam, I'll slip through and you follow quickly after me. Be ready with your revolver, for we shall probably have use for them before we are through."

"Me sabe," responded Sam. "Me have levovel allee slame. Me shloot quick."

"That's right. Now come on."

With that the detective slipped through the hole he had made in the wall.

Sam was directly behind him.

Hung Lee still had not noticed them, so distracted was he with the wound Ben had given him.

Neither had P'izen Kate, who had fainted from the severe choking, coupled with the fright she had received.

Fanny alone saw the men enter.

She had arisen from the floor, and stood staring at them, not knowing what to make of them.

She was puzzled from the fact that she suspected that one of them had shot Hung Lee, and yet she was evidently astonished to see that they were Chinamen.

Ben approached the girl, intending to whisper to her and reassure her, but, thinking that he was only another one of her enemies, she sprung back from him and uttered a shriek.

This brought Hung Lee to his senses, and he uttered a shrill whistle.

The next instant the place was swarming with Chinamen.

CHAPTER XV.

"MULLEE GAHILEE!"

As the Chinese swarmed into the place Fanny had the good sense to run back and conceal herself in the closet where she had hidden before.

Ben would have told her to make her escape through the opening in the wall, but for the fact that he knew she would be frightened if he should approach him.

Besides he had all he could attend to just then.

When the Celestials entered the place they stared about in wonderment, not comprehending what it all meant.

Had they seen a white man there, they would have understood it, but seeing only their own countrymen, as they supposed, they seemed to wonder what all the row was about.

But Hung Lee soon put them right.

Seeing their perplexity, he stormed about, doubtless using a good deal of Chinese profanity, which only had the effect of increasing the excitement and dismay of the others.

But at length, in apparent desperation, he pointed out the intruders and uttered the two potent words:

"Mullee gahileel!"

That was sufficient.

The succeeding instant the whole pack made a wild dash for our friends.

Ben, realizing the odds against him, and the little chance he would have against such numbers, made an attempt to reach the breach in the wall with a view to escaping in that direction.

But this was the worst move he could have made, as it turned out, for as soon as the Highbinders found that he was inclined to retreat, their courage increased accordingly.

Therefore by the time that he had realized the impossibility of escape and that he would have to fight, they were so close upon him that he could do little execution.

Sam Ling had shown his wisdom by taking time by the forelock, and was already knocking his assailants right and left with the butt of his revolver, they being too close upon him for him to use the weapon in any other way.

Ben turned from the breach when he saw the futility of trying to escape, and profiting by the example of his Mongolian ally, began to belabor his assailants with the stock of his pistol.

But the two men were at a disadvantage in every respect.

In the first place they were outnumbered twenty to one, and in the next place, they were divided.

In his attempt to escape Ben had left his friend in the middle of the room while he was at one side of it, and the mass of Chinamen were between them.

Their efforts, therefore, were of little avail.

It was in vain that Ben tried time and again to turn his revolver and fire into the surging crowd.

No sooner would he stop pouring blows upon the heads of those who came in his way for the purpose of using the muzzle of his pistol, when a dozen swarthy hands would attempt to grasp his wrist, and he would be compelled to resume his clubbing tactics in order to keep his assailants at bay.

He soon recalled that this sort of thing could not last long.

He would no more than clear a path in front of him than it would be refilled with fresh recruits, and his strength soon began to wane.

He was driven back tightly against the wall, so closely that he was unable to do much execution even with the butt of his revolver, and his enemies were apparently gaining in strength.

Then came the sad calamity of Sam being knocked senseless.

Ben saw this in a hasty glance he had ventured in the poor brave fellow's direction.

And then came a time when he could no longer defend himself.

He was crowded so close to the wall that he could not use his hands, and the next instant a dozen hands grasped his and the revolver was wrenched away.

It was soon over after that.

The infuriated Chinamen, not satisfied with having overpowered and disarmed him, proceeded to shower blow after blow upon his unprotected head until he was finally rendered insensible.

What happened after that the detective had no means of knowing.

Several hours must have elapsed, when he at last came to himself and realized that he was more dead than alive.

His head was nearly bursting with pain, he was in a high state of fever and burning with thirst.

But even all this affliction did not worry him so much as the question of where he was.

All he knew was that he was in total darkness and lying upon a hard, bare floor.

He attempted to rise, but found this a difficult, at first an impossible, task.

After making several attempts in this direction, he gave it up, and began to crawl.

He crawled for some distance, and finally came to a wall.

Feeling about, he found that it was only an ordinary plastered wall, and his hopes revived.

Then he crawled along the wall for some distance, and finally came to some sort of a stand it appeared, and putting his hand up and touching the top of this he found it was wet.

This was a delightful discovery.

It was an indication that water was not far off, and this was what he longed for above everything else.

Reaching up and taking a firm hold on the top of the stand, he pulled himself up to his feet with a painful effort.

Then he discovered that the arrangement was a sink, and he was not long in finding the faucet and turning the water on.

Placing his mouth beneath this, he drank long and deep.

Ben had never realized the blessing of cold water till that moment.

He would not have exchanged the bliss of that moment for a kingdom.

After satisfying his thirst, he bathed his face and hands in the delicious stream, and felt greatly relieved.

He could even walk slowly, although he realized that he had been bruised and cut in every portion of his body, and the operation of walking was very painful in the extreme.

As soon as he could walk a little, he moved about the wall, steady himself by it, and at length came to a door.

He was not long in discovering that the door was thoroughly barred, and he moved on hoping to find some other means of egress.

He found what seemed to be a window, but it was barred as thoroughly as the door.

It then occurred to him to search for some means of making a light.

His lantern was gone, as was also every article of value about him.

He succeeded in finding a few matches, however, and lighting one, looked about him.

He appeared to be in an unfurnished room of an ordinary flat or tenement.

There was but one door and one window, and both, as he had before discovered, fastened up so securely that escape was impossible.

"What could it all mean?" he mused.

Why had the Highbinders put him in there instead of killing him?

Perhaps that they had imagined that they had killed him.

He was certainly near enough dead for all purposes.

Having exhausted three matches, he walked about in the dark for awhile.

Still his thoughts were busy.

"Have they not put me here for the purpose of torturing me?" he said to himself.

"The fiends! Perhaps they will return and take me out for the purpose of inflicting some excruciating torture upon me."

Just at this point he thought he heard something.

At first he supposed it was a human voice, but quickly dispelled the idea and concluded that it must have been a cat.

Presently he heard it again.

This time it was more distinct than before, and his first theory returned to him.

He was satisfied that it was a human voice.

But where could it be?

Again he listened, and again it broke upon the deathly stillness of the place.

He hesitated no longer, but followed the direction of the sound.

This brought him plump against a wall, and when he again heard the cry he realized that it was on the opposite side of the wall.

Lighting another match, he found that what he had supposed to be a wall was the door of a closet.

CHAPTER XVI.

A DISCOVERY.

BEN had no more than made the discovery that the supposed wall was the door of a closet than he realized that the person or creature from whom or which the cry had emanated was in the closet.

What could it be?"

It was still natural to suppose it to be a cat under the circumstances, and yet he did not believe it was.

He tried the door, and found it fastened.

He lighted another match and by its light examined the door.

It appeared to be nailed up, and there was no sign of a lock of any description.

In vain he attempted to force his fingers behind the edge of the lintel, he could not.

Finally he groped his way along to the sink again in the hope of finding something there with which to open the door.

This required the assistance of another match, and he realized that his stock was growing very small.

However, he expended one more and with it looked about the sink.

There was no implement of any kind, nor was there any part of it that appeared capable of being torn away to be used for the purpose he desired.

And then a happy thought occurred to him.

Perhaps he could unscrew the faucet.

Ben was possessed of a powerful grip when at his best and, in spite of his present debilitated condition, he was no weakling.

Grasping the faucet with both hands he gave it a terrific twist, and had the satisfaction of feeling it give.

Encouraged by this, he concentrated all his power in a mighty effort and gave it another wrench.

This time the faucet yielded still more.

Another wrench loosened it to such an extent that his work from that on was comparatively easy.

In a few minutes longer he had removed the faucet and at once returned to the closet door.

Singularly the voice had entirely ceased since his effort to open the door, and he began to think that, after all, he had been mistaken.

However, he was bent upon opening the door, now that he had begun it, and began to hammer the frail boards with the heavy brass faucet.

He had not continued this long before he had the satisfaction of feeling that the door was yielding to his attacks, and this encouraged him to continue.

At length the door came open, and he quickly lit his last match and held it inside.

The sight that met him amply repaid him for all his labor.

There, seated upon the floor, in a half-terrified state, was Fanny Brooks.

"Why, Fanny!" he exclaimed.

But to his surprise, she shrank from him as if he had been a contagion.

"Why, Fanny!" he repeated. "Don't you know me?"

"Yes, I know that you are one of those horrid Chinese who want to carry me off and make a slave of me," she faltered in a tremulous voice.

Grim and pathetic as the occasion was, Ben could not refrain from laughing.

He had forgotten till that moment that he was still disguised as a Chinaman!

How he had escaped losing his wig and the rest of his make-up he was unable to understand, but the girl's words convinced him that it was still intact.

To remove any doubt upon the subject, he put his hand upon the top of his head, and then he found that his wig was still there."

"My dear girl," he resumed, "I am no more Chinese than you are. If I were I should not be a prisoner here as well as yourself."

She was silent a moment, and then asked timidly:

"Who are you?"

"My name is Benjamin Gaylord," he replied.

"You remember me now, don't you?"

"Yes," she said, still doubtfully, "I know Ben Gaylord, but—but—"

"What am I doing in this rig?" he interposed, laughing.

"Yes. You look exactly like a Chinese."

"Or did, rather," he laughed, for the match had gone out by this time and they were again in the dark.

"What are you doing in that horrid costume and disguise?" she repeated.

"You know I am a detective, don't you, Fanny?" he asked.

"Yes, Billy told me some time ago that you had become one."

"Well, it was through Billy's request that I went to work to try to find you."

"It was so good of you," she interrupted.

"Never mind. It is a part of my business, only in this case it was a good deal of a labor of love, for I always thought a good deal of you and Billy, ever since we were children at school."

"I know," she interjected impatiently. "Go on."

"I tried several schemes to get at these rascals, and all of them failed. At length I hit upon resuming my Chinese disguise or by changing it somewhat from what I formerly used."

"And didn't they know you?"

"It appears not."

"Well?"

"Well, last night— suppose it was last night, for I have lost all reckoning of time—in company with a friendly Chinaman I got into a passage which adjoins the room in which you and the old woman were talking. By looking through a crack in the wall I could see you and I could also hear what passed between you."

"I was just racking my brain for a plan to get in and rescue you, when Hung Lee came in, and the row ensued between him and the old woman. I saw that he intended to kill her, and was determined to save her if possible."

"Then it was you who fired the shot that wounded the Chinaman?" she interrupted.

"It was."

"I wondered who it could be. At first I thought it was the police, but when I saw you break through the wall I thought you were a Chinaman, and thought the shot must have come from some other direction."

"That was why you shrank from me, eh?"

"Yes."

"If you had listened to me then we might have made our escape before the old rascal gave the signal which brought all the hungry pack in upon us."

"I realize it now," she said, mournfully. "But when you consider the state of agitation I was in you cannot blame me."

"I do not blame you, Fanny," he rejoined, kindly. "I only say that it was unfortunate that you did not allow me to approach and tell you who I was."

"They overpowered you, didn't they?"

"Yes, they knocked me senseless. What I wonder at is that they did not kill me outright while they were about it. But, where are we?" he suddenly broke off."

"I haven't the least idea."

"Were you unconscious when they brought you here?"

"No; but they bundled a cloak or something about my head so that I could not tell where I was being taken."

"Did you seem to be going far?"

"No, I don't think we are far from where we were last night."

"It was last night, then?"

"Yes, but it must be nearly morning now."

"Then this place must be shut off from all light?"

"I imagine it is."

"I wish I had another match," continued the detective, fumbling fruitlessly about his pockets. "It would not be quite so bad if we could see each other."

"I don't want to see you—"

"What?"

"With that disguise," she exclaimed.

"Oh."

"But how are we going to get out of here, Ben?"

"That is a question that is bothering me. There seems to be no way of getting out. Oh, I have it!" he exclaimed, suddenly.

"What?"

"The faucet with which I broke open this door!"

"Good! Try it!"

Picking up the faucet again, Ben groped his way to the door once more, and, having found it, began to pound.

He had struck but a few blows, however, when he heard some one on the outside in the act of unlocking the door.

"We're lost!" gasped the girl. "It is the Chinamen!"

CHAPTER XVI.

NOT SO BAD AFTER ALL.

WHEN Ben discovered that some one was unlocking the door from the outside, his hope of escape vanished.

He knew that it could be no friendly hand that was about to come in upon him, for who, but the Chinamen themselves could have possessed a key to that door?

Therefore he retired into the room, shrunk back against the wall, and awaited his fate.

Fanny, who had emerged from the closet, was at his side, and he instinctively placed his arm about her as if to protect her from the intruder.

The door was soon opened and some one came into the dark room.

Once inside, however, the person paused and listened.

The stillness of death reigned.

Ben and Fanny held their breaths lest a sound should direct the intruder in their direction, and thus hasten their inevitable fate.

This lasted for perhaps a minute, and then the person was heard to mutter inarticulately to him or herself.

Still Ben and Fanny remained silent.

Then the new-comer was seen to scratch a match.

Our friends' hearts sunk.

They realized that their time was near at hand.

An instant later the flame of the match flared up, and they saw, to their surprise, that the new-comer was none other than P'izen Kate!

This mitigated their terror somewhat, but did not allay it, for although Ben knew that he could easily overpower her, he supposed that of course others were close at hand.

As the flaming match illuminated the room the old woman gazed about, and at length her eyes fell upon our young friends.

She started slightly at the sight, but soon recovered, and even smiled.

But Ben interpreted that smile to be one of malicious satisfaction, and it only had the effect of sending a shudder to his heart.

The match soon burned out, and the old woman lighted another.

Then holding it up closer to the faces of the young people, she said:

"Oh, I have found you, have I? I was afraid I wouldn't succeed in tracing you."

"Yes, here we are," replied Ben coldly, for he had by this time recovered his courage fully.

"What do you want?"

The detective's voice startled her.

She held the light more closely to his face, and finally gasped.

"Who are you? You do not speak like a Chinaman."

"I am not a Chinaman, thank God!" replied Ben.

She appeared to be more puzzled than before.

But after a long and careful stare, she suddenly exclaimed:

"I know now. I recognize your voice. You are the detective who came to my house the other night. I thought I recognized the voice when you first spoke, but could not place it."

Realizing that it would be useless for him to try to longer dissemble, and having about abandoned hope any way, the young detective retorted bitterly:

"Well, what of it? What do you want?"

"I came to take the girl out of here," answered the woman in a kindlier voice than either of them could have given her credit for, "but as I also find you here, you may as well go along too."

The young couple could not believe their senses.

Surely this old wretch must be jesting!

But upon second thought, Ben concluded that he had mistaken her motive.

She only meant to take them to some other place of confinement, and he at once began formulating a plan of escape.

But Fanny had not so interpreted the woman's words.

Her hopeful heart told her that the woman was somehow actuated by some generous motive, what she did not stop to consider.

"Take us out of here!" gasped the girl. "For good?"

"Not for bad, I hope," gasped the old woman.

"But come on. We have no time to parley.

We may even now be too late."

With that she grasped Fanny's hand and began to lead her toward the door.

Ben followed, of course, and soon they were on the outside, and descending a stairway which was quite as dark as the room had been.

But they were soon down to the bottom, and the late prisoners found that they had only been confined on the second floor.

"If I had known that," mused Ben, "I'll swear I would have made a greater effort to escape."

But another thought was agitating his mind.

Why had this woman suddenly taken it into her head to befriend them?

Had she some other motive in view, or was she really desirous of rescuing them?

Then he thought of the attempt upon her life by the Chinaman, and concluded that that had something to do with it.

She was probably taking this method of avenging herself for his ill-treatment.

No word passed between the trio until they reached the street.

Then the woman said:

"Now go. I have done my part. If you do not make your escape now it is your own faults."

Ben was dumfounded.

He did not reply for a moment, and then mustered courage to speak:

"But stay! You must accept some reward for this, my good woman. I haven't a cent with me, as those fellows cleaned me out, but if you will let me know where I can find you, I shall reward you for your kindness to-night."

The woman laughed.

"You would like to find me again, wouldn't you, young man?" she chuckled. "Do you imagine I'm so green as to tell you where to come and arrest me?"

"No, I'll swear I have no such intention," he asserted earnestly. "I wish to arrest Hung Lee, and shall do so at the earliest opportunity, but after your humanity to-night, I should consider myself an ingrate to arrest you. Let some one else do that."

The woman hesitated a moment, and then indulged in another chuckle.

"Ah, young man, I can't trust you. I'm sorry, but it is better to be on the safe side. Good-night, and God bless you!"

And she turned upon her heel.

Ben and Fanny stood watching her in the dim light in dumb amazement.

If she was so suspicious of him, why had she gone to the trouble to rescue him?

She did not proceed far, however, when she stopped, stood for a second, and then hastily retraced her steps.

"I forgot something," she said, as she approached the couple. "You said, and I know it to be a fact, that you have no money. You want some to get home. I should have thought of this before, but I'm apt to be forgetful. Here," she went on, handing Ben some change. "It will enable you to ride home."

And again she was off, before the detective could offer a protest.

"That is a strange creature," commented Ben, as they watched her trundling away until she was lost in shadow. "A queer mixture of fiendishness and generosity."

"I don't believe she is half as bad as she seems," interposed Fanny, who had been deeply moved by the woman's noble action. "I wish she would let us do something for her. I should like to take her with me and give her a home. I believe if she had a chance she would be a good woman."

"You'd better not try any experiments of that kind, Fanny," returned Ben, laughing. "It would be something like petting a tigress. She might be docile for awhile, but would be likely to scratch you sooner or later."

"I don't believe it," sighed the girl. "Anyway, I'm glad we're out of her clutches."

"No more so than I am," rejoined Ben. "But, what puzzles me is how she came to do this."

"Out of her goodness of heart."

"Don't you believe a word of it. People of her kind are not in the habit of doing things out of goodness of heart."

"What could have actuated her, then?"

"She did it, in my opinion, to get even with old Hung Lee for attempting to kill her last night."

"Do you think that is the reason?"

"I haven't the least doubt of it."

"You may be right, but I would rather believe that she was actuated by real goodness of heart."

"That is because you possess such a good heart yourself, Fanny," laughed Ben. "I am constituted differently, and so think differently. But here we are at the station."

They took the train, and, after seeing Fanny safely home, Ben returned to his own room.

He spent the remainder of the night on arriving home in formulating a new plan to arrest Hung Lee.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A REAL CLUE AT LAST.

It was long after daylight when Ben finally dropped asleep, nevertheless, he was up early in the forenoon.

He was sore and weak from his last night's experience, but the little sleep he had got had refreshed him, and the thought of Fanny's hav-

ing been rescued, although through no effort of his own, buoyed him up for a fresh attempt to capture the arch fiend, Hung Lee.

But the matter that agitated him most was the fate of poor Sam Ling.

"I hope the poor fellow wasn't killed," he sighed, as he recalled the young Chinaman's heroism. "He told the truth when he said he could fight like the Old Scratch. I didn't imagine he had it in him."

As soon as he had breakfasted, therefore, the detective called round at the laundry of his friend Hap Kee to see if he knew what had become of Sam Ling.

To his utter surprise the first person he met on entering the place was Sam himself.

He had a bandage about his head, but otherwise appeared to be in prime condition, and as happy as usual.

"Hullo, Blen!" he cried, on seeing the detective. "How you glit out?"

"Oh, I got out allright," replied Ben. "What astonishes me is how you managed to escape alive."

"Oh, me all littee," grinned Sam. "Highbinders no can kill Sam Ling. Me too stlong. No can kill. Sam Ling heep dam stlong!"

"I believe you, Sam," laughed the detective, "otherwise they would have done for you last night."

"No can kill," he repeated.

"So it would seem. But we didn't get our man after all."

"Hung Lee?"

"Yes."

"Blettee you ketch quick, Blen."

"Why?"

"He glo Slan Flancisclo right away."

"How do you know?"

"Sam Hop say."

"Who is Sam Hop?"

"Him Hung Lee flend—heep stlong flend."

"However, he may have been giving you a game of talk, Sam," observed the detective. "Does he know what he is talking about?"

"Yep, he know. Sam Hop lite allee letters Hung Lee."

"Oh, he's Hung Lee's secretary, eh?"

"Yep, siekeetalee."

"When does he expect to go, Sam?"

"Tlo-night."

"All right, I'll try and head him off. I suppose you wouldn't care to take a hand in another affair like that of last night, would you, Sam?"

"Yep, me likee!" cried the Chinaman, delightedly. "Me likee heep, you blet!"

"All right, call round at my house about two o'clock and I'll be ready for you."

"All littee; me ble lere, Blen."

On returning to his room the detective resumed his Chinese costume and make-up, except that he made some alterations in the cast of his features in order that those who had seen him on the former occasion would not recognize him now.

Upon examination he found that the warrant for the Chinaman's arrest was one of the few things the Highbinders had left in his pockets.

"That is fortunate," he mused, "as it saves me the trouble of going before another police justice."

By the time he was ready for the expedition Sam Ling arrived, and they set off at once for Chinatown.

Sam had dressed himself in an entirely different suit of clothes from the one he had worn before, and altered his appearance still further by sticking a queer looking mustache on his lip.

They directed their course toward Hung Lee's place and Ben walked boldly in, followed by his friend.

According to a previous agreement Sam did the talking, and asked for Hung Lee.

He was informed that the Chinaman had already taken his departure for San Francisco.

"I don't believe a word of it," said Ben, as soon as they were again on the outside. "It is a bluff, depend upon it."

"Me t'ink blull-e too, Blen," replied Sam. "Hung Lee no go. He hide like lat slum place."

It occurred to Ben to walk around by the place on Bayard street, where the fight had occurred the night before.

Taking a roundabout course, they approached the place from a different direction.

When within half a block of the place they were surprised to see old Kate come out of a door and walk away in the direction of the Bayard street place.

"See!" cried Sam excitedly. "Lat P'izen Kate!"

"So I see," replied Ben. "We'll follow her and see where she goes."

They did so, and were surprised to find that

she did not go to the place where the fight had occurred, but continued around the block into Pell street.

Following her along this street, they saw her enter another door.

It was the house in which Bob and Fanny had been confined.

When they got to the door she was already ascending the stairs, and after allowing her to reach the top, Ben and his companion followed.

Kate did not enter the room where Ben and Fanny were, the night previous, but a door on the opposite side of the hall.

Stepping up to this door, Ben put his ear to it and listened.

He could hear talking within, and one of the speakers was a Chinaman.

When he turned he saw that Sam was also listening, and as they exchanged looks, Sam whispered:

"Hung Lee!"

"Yes, I think it is," rejoined Ben. "I wish we could get near enough to hear what they are talking about."

Then it occurred to him to peep through the key-hole, and he saw that the speakers were not in the room into which the door opened, so he tried the door, and finding it unlocked, opened it softly and went in.

Sam followed, and closing the door noiselessly, the detective looked about him.

Kate and the Chinaman were in the next room, the door of which was slightly ajar.

Ben crept softly up close beside the door, and listened.

From this point he could hear everything that was said.

The old woman seemed to be holding her own this time and the Chinaman was not succeeding in intimidating her, as he had done the night before.

"Yes," she was heard to say, "I did set them at liberty, as I had a right to do."

"Whalet flor yo' do?" demanded the Chinaman, angrily.

"For the purpose of showing you that you could not mistreat me as you did last night. I did it in revenge."

"And yo' no flade me kill?"

"Not a particle. You have threatened that often enough and attempted it, too, but somehow you never succeeded."

"Me will!" threatened the Chinaman. "Yo' flool wil me, P'izen Kate me, kill quick!"

"You only think you will! Now, look here, Hung Lee, you probably are not aware of it, but I know who killed Old Stump!"

"Whalet?" and the Chinaman was heard to jump from his seat in an excited manner. "Yo' know who killie?"

"Yes, I know?"

"How, yo' know, Kate?"

"I saw you follow him from Pell street round into Bayard street, slip up behind him and cover his face with a handkerchief."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Hung Lee. "Walet yo' talkee? Hlankeechee no kill."

"No, an ordinary handkerchief would not, but after you had run away I picked up the handkerchief and examined it. It was saturated with enough of your Chinese poison to kill a dozen men."

"W'e're lat hankeechee now, Kate?"

"I have it."

"Whalet yo' do wil hankeechee, Kate?"

"I shall keep it, and the very next time you threaten me I shall give it to the police."

"Oh, Katee, me no talkee kill som' mo'e, yo' no give policee!" pleaded the terrified Chinaman.

"Me no kill; me no tly kill!"

"Very well, that is a bargain, is it?"

"Yep, lat balegan, Kate," cried the man earnestly. "Yo' gillem me hankeechee?"

"No, you had better give me that handkerchief!"

The speaker was Ben Gaylord.

He had stepped into the room at that juncture and covered the pair with his revolvers.

"And as for you, Hung Lee, you are my prisoner! I have a warrant here for your arrest for abducting Fanny Brooks and murdering Thomas Townsend, otherwise known as Old Stump!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ROUND UP.

HUNG LEE, who was an arrant coward at heart, was so terrified when he saw that the game was up, that he did not even attempt to signal his allies, if he had any within call.

He stared wildly and helplessly at the detective, but did not speak.

A dead silence fell upon the scene, which lasted for a minute or so, and then the Chinaman made a quick move with his hand,

Ben thought he was about to draw a revolver, and prepared to shoot in case he should attempt anything of the kind; but, he was surprised to see that he only drew out a handkerchief.

The truth flashed upon the detective instantly, but the Chinaman was too quick for him, for, before Ben could stay his hand, the Oriental had clapped the handkerchief to his own nostrils!

Even then the detective sprung forward and tried to snatch his hand away, but he was too late.

The succeeding instant Hung Lee's head drooped forward on his breast, he uttered a gasp, and passed away.

"My God! he has killed himself!" cried the woman excitedly.

"There is no doubt of that," replied the detective. "But it is just as well, I suppose. He has saved the State the expense of doing it for him."

Ben took the woman into custody, to be detained as a witness, and she delivered the handkerchief with which Hung Lee had murdered Old Stump, and upon examination by chemical experts, it was found to contain a subtle poison little known to the chemists of this country, but so potent that when placed over the nostrils of a cat the animal expired almost instantly.

Ben had the laugh on the doctor who had pronounced the old man's death to be the result of alcoholism, and he concluded that "the boy" knew something after all.

Ben visited the old woman at the House of Detention a few days after and had a long talk with her.

"I don't know whether you intend to bring any charge against me or not," she said, "but I want to thank you for bringing about what was equivalent to the indictment and execution of Hung Lee for the murder of Stump."

"Then you thought something of the old man?" interposed Ben.

"Not much, although I did once."

"An old beau, eh?"

"More than that."

"Eh?"

"He was my husband."

"You don't tell me!"

"Yes; and there was no better man before he got to drinking and gambling. He was pretty well off at one time."

"But he got pretty low down toward the last."

"Yes, he went completely to the dogs."

"He must have been an ignorant man, wasn't he?"

"You refer to his uncouth manner of speaking?"

"Yes."

"That was assumed after he got to running with the crowd of ruffians and thieves, and I suppose toward the last he could speak in no other way."

"What was Hung Lee's motive for killing Stump?"

"Why, you know the night you went into the passage with the old man and the young man who was with you?"

"Yes."

"Well, one of Hung Lee's spies followed you in and heard some of your conversation. He carried this at once to the Chinaman and he knew that Thomas had betrayed him. He watched for the old man and saw him emerge from the passage, pass out through the fan-tan room and round into Bayard street. Hung Lee followed him, and as he was about to enter the door of a house there he clapped the poisoned handkerchief over his nostrils, as you saw him do to himself, held it there for an instant, and then dropped it and run off."

"The old man was frequently employed by Hung Lee, wasn't he?"

"Yes, he used to do a good deal of the Chinaman's dirty work, but I will say this for him, that he was always ashamed of it and would have been willing at any time to have washed his hands of him forever, had not the Chinaman kept him in terror of his life."

"He was afraid to quit, then?"

"Yes."

"And yet Hung Lee was a great coward, as you saw when I went to arrest him."

"I know he was; but he was surrounded by his secret organization who were scattered everywhere, and he could never tell at what moment some secret assassin would step from a dark corner and either stab him with the 'needle dagger' or poison him with the deadly meurtella, the Chinese poison."

"Where did Stump first meet this Chinaman?"

"In San Francisco. It was while my husband was still well to do. He was out there on business, but got to drinking, and while under the influence of liquor wandered out into what is known as Chinatown. He did something while there to incense the Chinese and the Highbinders decided to kill him, but Hung Lee, whose friendship Tom had gained in some way, got him away from the murderers and saved his life."

"And this rendered him grateful to the Chinaman, I presume?"

"Yes, and laid the foundation for his future slavery to him."

"How did you come to get in with Hung Lee?" asked Ben.

"It was through my husband," replied the woman, with a sigh. "When he began to sink he dragged me down with him."

"Who gave you the significant name of 'Poison Kate'?"

The woman laughed.

"There is something funny about that," she smiled. "As soon as I got in with these people and learned their methods, I realized that the first misstep I should make would subject me to their wrath and that I was liable at any time to fall a victim to their terrible poison, so I set about discovering an antidote for it. I succeeded in discovering an infallible antidote and always kept it about me. Well, the time came when it served me a good purpose. They attempted to kill me with this meurtella, but the antidote saved me, and they declared that the reason the poison had no effect on me was that I was poison myself, and from that out I was called 'Poison Kate,' or 'P'izen Kate,' as they called it."

In consideration of her valuable testimony in exposing the members of the murderous clan of Highbinders, and her interference in preventing the death of the detective and the girl, Ben did not prosecute the charges against old Kate, and she afterward reformed and became a good woman.

Ben had been so busy since the final capture of the Chinaman and P'izen Kate that he had not had time to see his friend Billy Brooks and his sister Fanny, but on his return to his room, after the trial, he was agreeably surprised to find them, together with their father and mother and several other friends, there awaiting him.

"We have been waiting all this time for an opportunity to thank you for your noble work in rescuing our darling, Mr. Gaylord," said Fanny's mother, as soon as the young detective appeared. "We feel that we owe you a great debt of gratitude."

"And something more," added Billy, grasping Ben's hand warmly. "I shall soon come into my fortune now, and you will do me the favor of accepting a portion of it."

"Yes," put in Fanny, blushing. "It would not be too much after what Ben has done for us, to give him at least half of your money, Billy."

"Half it shall be!" declared Billy earnestly.

"I believe I have something to say in the matter," interjected Ben stoutly, "and I say that I will accept nothing of the kind."

"Oh, but I insist," cried Billy, passionately.

"And I!" added Fanny.

"And I resist," persisted Ben. "It is enough for me to know that I did my duty and was instrumental in uniting and restoring the happiness of a family, and to know that I have won their esteem."

"You always had that," ventured Fanny.

"In the highest sense," averred Billy. "But you must have something more. You are no friend of mine unless you accept a portion of my wealth."

"Well, if you insist," finally yielded Ben. "But it must not be much."

"We shall settle that part of it," interposed Billy. "It shall be enough to repay you for risking your life for sister."

To everybody's surprise there was a new arrival at that moment.

It was Sam Ling!

He had not seen the detective since the day when Hung Lee committed hara-kiri, as the Chinese call it, and he was anxious for the fate of his young friend.

"How are you, Sam?" cried Ben, grasping his hand.

"Me all litte!" assured the Chinaman, with a broad grin. "How you, Blen?"

"First class, Sam. By the way, Billy, here is a worthy legatee of some of your wealth."

"And he shall have it," replied Billy earnestly.

And this explains how Sam Ling was able to go into the laundry business on his own account.

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